



January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

**Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 877**

***Relating to: funding for victim services and domestic abuse services, training for grant recipients, grants to child advocacy centers, and making an appropriation***

Dear Committee Members:

The federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund, which is the largest funding source for victim services both locally and nationally, is facing a devastating shortfall. This fund is supported through fees and fines resulting from the victims' federal court cases, and it has seen decreasing revenues in recent years. Crimes such as domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse against children have gone underreported and under prosecuted, and the federal government has sought to settle more of these cases out of court through deferred prosecution agreements.

This hit to the fund's finances led Congress to pass the VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021, which requires money penalties from these agreements to go into the Crimes Victims Fund. However, the years of reduced funding has left VOCA in a hole that will take years to rebound from, even with these reforms.

Unfortunately, the critical services provided by the fund are taking the brunt of the funding crisis. Back in October, the federal Department of Justice announced that Wisconsin could expect a 40% drop in funding next year. According to the Office of Crime Victim Services, the cut in funding would only be able to support 52 of the 135 current VOCA programs in the state.

These cuts are coming at a time when abuse is on the rise. According to a 2022 statewide homicide report, Wisconsin lost 96 lives due to domestic violence last year. This is the highest total since 2000, and a 20% increase from 2021's record-breaking total of 80 people.

Our child advocacy centers, or CACs, are also struggling. CACs work with law enforcement to investigate and support efforts to thwart child abuse and neglect. For example, they will often interview victims on behalf of police departments because CACs tend to be in more child-friendly environments that are less traumatic to the children being questioned. As a former police chief, I utilized CACs quite often, and I think they are an incredibly valuable resource for our state.

Senate Bill 877 provides crucial funding for these programs. The bill increases funding for DOJ-awarded grants for organizations that provide services to victims of sexual assault by \$7 million in 2023-24, and \$18 million in 2024-25; and it also increases funding for DCF-awarded grants to organizations that provide domestic violence services by \$7 million in fiscal year 2023-24 and \$18 million in 2024-25. This bill also advances the important work of CACs combating child abuse by increasing funding for DOJ contracts to specified child advocacy centers from \$17,000 each year to \$150,000 each year while creating a new CAC in Ozaukee County and funds the statewide organizing body.

Thank you all again for listening about this important legislation. I am happy to take any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jesse James".

Senator Jesse James  
23rd Senate District



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# PATRICK SNYDER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 85<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 877

Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Vice-Chairwoman Cabral-Guevara and members of the Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to allow me to testify on Senate Bill 877. This legislation is needed because Wisconsin needs to fill a gap caused by the federal government.

Many important survivor and victim services providers obtain funding through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund, the largest funding source for victim services both locally and nationally. This fund is supported through fees and fines resulting from the victims' federal court cases. However, while the need for domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse against children services continues to increase, crimes are going underreported and under prosecuted. The federal government has also sought to settle more of these cases out of court through deferred prosecution agreements and non-prosecution agreements, further inhibiting funding from going into the program. This resulted in the enactment of the VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021, which requires monetary penalties from these agreements to go into the Crimes Victims Fund. While this reform is a step in the right direction, it will still take years for the fund to recuperate the funds lost in the preceding years.

As a result, services are being cut across the country. For instance, the federal Department of Justice announced that Wisconsin could expect a 40% drop in funding next year. According to the Office of Crime Victim Services, the cut in funding would only be able to support 52 of the 135 current VOCA programs in the state. This looming catastrophe was first brought to my attention by Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) across the State. CACs provide multi-disciplinary approaches to investigating and substantiating child abuse and neglect. CAC's work with law enforcement and are trained to interview child victims in a friendly manner and in a less traumatic environment than a police station. I have long sought to support CACs who are vital partners working with our law enforcement to protect the most vulnerable and damaged children across Wisconsin.

Additionally, this legislation would provide stopgap funding to domestic violence centers who also provide critical services across our State. According to a 2022 statewide homicide report, Wisconsin lost 96 lives due to domestic violence last year. This is the highest total since 2000, and a 20% increase from 2021's record-breaking total of 80 people. The loss of federal VOCA funding could leave large gaps in services for some of our most important and vital needs.

While I am proud to have authored this legislation, I am disappointed that I had to. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



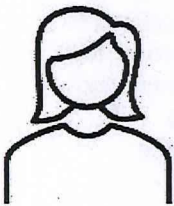


# Client Testimonials

## Survivors of Domestic Violence

***"These and many other stories reflect the reality of survivor experiences and the types of services provided to keep them safe. The support they are afforded when our domestic abuse and sexual assault programs and shelters have the funding they need to remain open, is what helps to keep survivors safe."***

*- Domestic Violence Agency Representative*



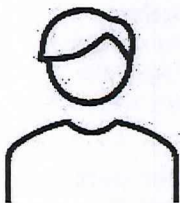
### Crystal

Crystal was in an intense relationship with her partner, who she lived with. Her partner grew violent and abusive. At a small party that included Crystal's family members, he became angry and attacked her. His blows caused a fracture to Crystal's eye socket, a brain bleed, and permanent blindness in one eye. She was hospitalized for days because of these injuries.

Feeling broken and unsupported by law enforcement and judicial systems, Crystal approached a domestic violence agency with targeted services to her cultural background. An advocate worked with her to determine what needed to be done to get her **feeling safe and stable**. Through the partnership of Crystal and her advocate, a restraining order was filed against Crystal's abuser within weeks. He was then arrested.

The advocate also stayed by Crystal's side and was a source of emotional support at her revocation hearing. At the hearing, the District Attorney reversed their previous decision to not file charges. This move was **possible only through the advocate's perseverance**.

A week after the abuser's arrest, Crystal brought treats to the DV agency's office to thank them for their critical support. She said **for the first time since her attack, she was able to sleep**.



### Dan

Dan was involved in an abusive relationship and needed extensive help in getting out of his relationship, obtaining custody of his daughters, Ann and Mary, and finding a safe, healthy living environment to provide for his family.

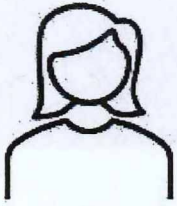
Domestic violence agency advocates **successfully helped Dan to leave his abuser, accompanied him to court, assisted with the custody process, and helped him secure safe, affordable housing**. Dan lives with a disability which makes it difficult for him to have employment. Agency advocates further helped connect him with CARES funded programs to assist him in affording his housing and even found furnishings for his new apartment. **He had to completely start over with a new life and reports that "He couldn't have done it without the help of [agency]."**







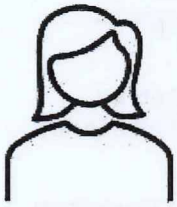
## Client Testimonials: Survivors of Domestic Violence



### Rhonda

Rhonda, a 28-year-old mother of four, came to an agency after her abuser attacked her publicly in the presence of witnesses and her children. Witnesses called the authorities, fearing for her safety. Because this was not the first police contact regarding the abuse, police officers on the scene contacted Child Protective Services. Within just a few days following the incident, Rhonda's children were removed from her custody. The case worker told her she needed to find her own place away from the abuser, and take domestic violence prevention courses. As a result, Rhonda left her home with only a few possessions, and became homeless, sleeping in her car.

While homeless, she found a domestic violence agency on social media and shared her dire situation. Over the next eight months, Rhonda **worked with this DV agency to not only take prevention courses, but to file a restraining order, get a job, and secure housing.** During this time, Rhonda was granted a reunification hearing. Once her advocate heard this, she collected donations for Rhonda's children so they would have new clothing, toys, and bedding when they came home. As a result of the services Rhonda received and her dedication to being reunited with family, **Rhonda's children were returned to her.** Rhonda said that she will always recommend that women receive services from the agency that helped her. **She said the agency exceeded her expectations, and she will be forever grateful.**



### Grace

Grace arrived at a domestic violence agency in desperate need of food and shelter. She shared with staff what had happened that led her to their door. Grace's relationship with her husband of 17 years was one marred by extreme emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. He often threatened to beat her or used violence to force her to perform sexual acts with others for money that was used to support his substance misuse. Their seven children were removed from their custody due to his abuse and substance addiction. Each day of Grace's life was one of struggle: no hot water and little to no food in the household, which led her to depend on food pantries and restaurant dumpsters to survive.

Grace had no support from family and little faith in the system, but she knew she needed to reach out for help; she became increasingly afraid her husband would kill her. **Advocates moved quickly to put her up in a motel** after accompanying her to her home to safely collect her things and important papers. Advocates provided Grace with food and personal hygiene items, and through their connections with other community-based organizations, they were also able to get her clothes, shoes, and blankets.

**Now in a healthier, safer space,** Grace decided to pursue the thing she'd wanted to for years: finding her daughter who had been removed by Child Protective Services and was now 21 years-old. Grace's advocates helped her find her daughter – who had also been looking for Grace – through social media. The two reunited, and Grace moved in with her daughter and recently met her grandchildren for the first time.

**Together, they are rebuilding their lives as individuals and as a family.**





### Lily

Locked in the basement with no food or water, a pregnant woman named Lily clung to hope. She was successful in sneaking her abuser's phone before he retreated up the stairs earlier that day. She began typing into the search bar, "battered women's shelter near me" she dialed the first number she saw and heard a voice say, "Thank you for calling [Program Name], how can I help you?"

Three days later, Lily was finally free. She successfully escaped the basement and made it to the safety of her advocate's car waiting nearby. She arrived at the domestic violence agency's shelter and began safety planning with an advocate. Although she was now in a safe location, she knew she and her unborn baby needed medical attention. She had not seen a doctor since her abuser had sexually assaulted her and she became pregnant. She was also severely malnourished and had scrapes and bruises from living in a basement and crawling out a window to escape. Lily decided she wanted to go to the emergency room to seek care.

Two advocates transported her to the hospital and provided her with support. Lily was terrified of her abuser finding her. **An advocate stayed by her side the entire time, holding her hand and assuring her she was not alone.** Over the next few days, she received medical care and advocacy in the hospital.

**If it wasn't for the domestic violence agency, Lily, and her unborn baby may still be locked in that basement.** She would not have received medical care for the violence she endured. This experience serves as a reminder that to end violence, **it is crucial that domestic violence agencies are always there to answer the calls of survivors.**





**TO:** Chair James, Vice-Chair Cabral-Guevara, and Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

**FROM:** John Elliott, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence

**DATE:** January 25, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Senate Bill 877

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The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is committed to the goal that every individual and family in Wisconsin deserves to be safe and free from violence in their homes. DCF is testifying in strong support of SB-877. Without action this session, domestic violence agencies across Wisconsin will provide fewer services, and many will likely need to shut their doors altogether.

Currently, DCF funds victim services for 81 non-profit organizations and 10 tribes. The agencies provide a variety of **essential** services for individuals impacted by domestic violence including shelter care, advocacy, counseling services, accompaniment to medical appointments or transportation assistance. In 2022, WI providers served nearly **38,000** individuals. They responded to over **100,000** calls for help. They provided over **250,000** nights of shelter to those impacted by domestic violence. **Nearly half** of individuals staying at domestic violence shelters are children accompanying their parent, who are often desperately working to keep them safe from harm.

Wisconsin is currently facing the impacts from unprecedented levels of domestic violence. Wisconsin's most recent 2022 statewide homicide report showed the **highest** loss of life due to domestic violence ever (a 20% increase compared to the year prior). According to the recent report "Economic Impact of Domestic Violence in Milwaukee and Wisconsin", more than **1 in 3** women in Wisconsin will experience domestic violence over the course of their lifetimes. In Wisconsin, over **90,000 women every year** will experience domestic violence. This does untold damage to the citizens of our state and their children.



These numbers only tell part of the story. DCF is so very grateful to the survivors who were willing to share their stories, which are included along with this testimony. These stories remind us that the stakes of these decisions are high; and that it is not hyperbole to say that for many, these services can be the difference between life and death.

DCF is proud of the service provided by grantees, who work to provide the best possible services to individuals and families in crisis. Despite this, a recent survey showed that at a minimum, **20%** of requests for domestic abuse supports went **unanswered** due to lack of resources. In 2022, nearly **13,000** requests for shelter were unfulfilled because a shelter bed was unavailable. **At DCF's current funding levels**, Wisconsin's domestic violence services have not been able to keep up with the increasing need for services. Survivors whose needs go unmet often have no choice but to stay and endure continued violence.

This increased need for services will be further impacted by significant cuts in federal funding. Wisconsin has seen precipitous federal funding decreases to support domestic violence survivors since 2019. In addition to these already deep cuts, the federal Department of Justice has announced that Wisconsin will receive another **40% decrease** in federal funding starting in 2024. This will result in DOJ's Office of Crime Services funding fewer than **half** of the programs that currently receive funding. This will translate to fewer survivors being served, but also less comprehensive and qualified supports available to those who are able to access services.

Providing additional funding to support survivors, also makes good fiscal sense. Domestic Violence has an estimated impact of **\$658 million** in economic losses to the state of Wisconsin. Wisconsin can change its trajectory by investing in **supporting** survivors. Economic analysis have shown that a \$1 Investment in domestic violence assistance **saves over \$9** in a variety of costs. Private and local funding will not be able to close the gap in Wisconsin. Most domestic violence agencies already braid a variety of funding sources in order to cover the basic services needed for survivors. A recent survey of Wisconsin providers found that most agencies **already** rely on private donations and community support for roughly half their existing funding. A strategic state investment to replace federal funds is crucial to providing much needed services in 2024 and in years to come.





January 25, 2024

To: Chairman James and Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health,  
Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

From: Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association

Re: Support Senate Bill 877, Funding for Victim Services and Domestic Abuse  
Services

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Chairman James and committee members, thank you for your willingness to hold a hearing on this legislation. We would also like to thank you and Representative Snyder for authoring this legislation.

Additionally, we would like to thank committee members Senators Carpenter and Johnson for cosponsoring this legislation.

As you likely know, Senate Bill 877 would increase funding levels for victim services, domestic abuse services, and child advocacy centers as well as provide training for the grant recipients.

Survivors of crimes, especially domestic abuse, often have a long physical and psychological recovery. We should aid in this recovery whenever possible. That is why the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association supports providing additional resources for the services outlined in SB 877.

Wisconsin domestic violence statistics have remained consistently high, and services often do not meet the needs of survivors.

Statistics of children experiencing abuse are just as devastating. Child Advocacy Centers fill an unfortunate need in society and their ability to provide adequate services depends on having appropriate resources.

We are very pleased to join the Wisconsin State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police, the Wisconsin Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Association, and the Badger State Sheriffs' Association in supporting Senate Bill 877.

Thank you again for your attention to this matter and I am happy to take questions at this time.





Dear Chairperson James and members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Children and Families,

The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) and End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin appreciates the opportunity to offer this written testimony for your consideration. WCASA and End Abuse WI function both to support and represent member Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence service providers respectively, while advancing the movement to end violence in the state and nationally. We thank Committee Chair James for holding a public hearing on this bill today and for his leadership on this legislation. We also thank Senator Agard and Representatives Conley and Snyder for their leadership on this legislation in both houses.

Sexual and domestic violence are significant problems in Wisconsin.

- 658,000 women have experienced rape in their lifetime (1 in 4)
- 1,300,000 women have experienced contact sexual violence (1 in 2)
- 637,000 men have experienced contact sexual violence (1 in 4)
- In 2022, 96 individuals died in Wisconsin due to domestic violence at a rate of approximately one death every 3.8 days.
- 1 in every 6 domestic violence homicides in the United States happens in Wisconsin.
- The annual economic cost of domestic violence in Wisconsin is estimated at \$657 million.

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds victim service providers across Wisconsin; services provided under this program include safety planning, community service referrals, counseling, crisis intervention and legal advocacy.

Currently, WI DOJ awards \$44.5 million per year. Unfortunately, the Department of Justice announced that their projected award for FY 2024 will be approximately \$13 million which amounts to a 70% reduction. This is due to significant reductions in deposits to the Crime Victims Fund (CVF), over the past several years, which is the source of VOCA funding at the federal level. Finally, WI DOJ is expecting they will have a cap of \$250k on awards per grantee.

The consequences of the reduction in VOCA awards will be devastating to service providers across the state. Programs will be forced to lay off staff, reduce services, and/or shut their doors. The impact will fall hardest on the smallest programs, particularly programs in rural communities, low-income communities, and Communities of Color. Potentially thousands of victims statewide will lose access to lifesaving and life-sustaining child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and other victim services. Without access to these critical services, the real-time impact will not only be felt by individuals and families, but will also ripple through our communities.

The Sexual Assault Victim Services (SAVS) Grant Program, administered by the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ), is the only state program that funds sexual violence prevention initiatives and direct services for survivors and their families. The DV services program administered through the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the only state program that funds domestic violence prevention initiatives.





SAVS is currently funded at **\$2.235 million** annually, DV services are currently funded at **\$12.4 million** annually. Those funding levels have been static for the past decade. Even at existing levels, SAVS and DV Services funding do not meet the needs of survivors in Wisconsin. For example, on a single day in Wisconsin last year, victims made 319 requests for services that programs could not provide because they did not have the resources. Approximately 74% of these unmet requests were for emergency shelter, hotels, motels, and other housing. That works out to be 116,435 survivors per year without access to critical and lifesaving services. Additionally, many programs are currently struggling with staff turnover, due primarily to salary rates, high stress levels, and on-call requirements. This will be exacerbated if programs are forced to lay off staff due to funding cuts, which will ultimately mean fewer services available for survivors. Finally, this also comes at a time when many programs are reporting an increase in demand for sexual assault services.

Now is the time for Wisconsin to make an investment in sexual and domestic violence services and prevention. Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony today. We appreciate the Committee's thoughtful consideration and urge you to please pass this lifesaving legislation. Please contact Jenna Gormal [jennag@endabusewi.org](mailto:jennag@endabusewi.org) and Ian Henderson [ianh@wcasa.org](mailto:ianh@wcasa.org) with any further questions.





**TO:** Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children & Families  
**FROM:** Nila Grahl, Southeast Region Manager, Racine, Kenosha & Walworth Child Advocacy Centers, Children's Wisconsin  
**DATE:** Thursday, January 25, 2024  
**RE:** Support for SB 877 – Funding for victim services, including grants to child advocacy centers

Chair James and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you today. My name is Nila Grahl and I lead Children's Wisconsin's (Children's) child advocacy centers in Racine, Kenosha and Walworth Counties. I'm here today to share Children's strong support for this bipartisan legislation. We want to thank you, Senator James, as a bill author with Senator Agard, along with Representatives Snyder and Conley, for your work on this proposal, as well as several other members of this committee for cosponsoring this legislation.

Children's is the region's only independent health care system dedicated solely to the health and well-being of kids. As such, we offer a wide array of programs and services inside our hospital and clinic walls and out in our communities. Between our hospitals in Milwaukee and Neenah, primary, specialty and urgent care clinics and community services offices across the state – we provide kids and their families with care and services they need to promote health, safety and well-being. While today my remarks will center on care and services we provide to children who have suffered abuse, assault, neglect and trauma, I do want the committee to know that Children's also offers several prevention-focused programs and services across the state, working upstream to help support parents with education and resources, provide child abuse awareness and education for the community, and so much more.

When we think of agencies serving victims of crime, child advocacy centers (CACs) are often hidden gems in communities across the state, serving our youngest and most vulnerable victims. CACs provide unique services including forensic interviews, medical evaluations and advocacy support. When a child has made a disclosure of abuse and an investigation begins, more often than not that child is brought to a CAC. Forensic interviewers provide children with a safe space to tell their story by asking non-leading, unbiased questions that meet forensic standards. This interview is recorded and observed in real time by sensitive crime detectives, assistant district attorneys and Child Protective Service workers. Often this recorded interview is used in court, sometimes years after the alleged abuse took place, leading to critical convictions, ensuring the child victim is protected from further harm. Advocates in the CAC are also there to answer questions, offer guidance about next steps and provide referrals for ongoing care, counseling and other supports the child and family may require.

The CAC team works together to ensure that the evaluation of an abuse allegation minimizes the re-traumatization of a child. We collaborate closely with law enforcement and Child Protective Services to ensure, as often as possible, that a child only has to be seen and tell their story once during the investigation. Our work helps to start the healing process for children and their caregivers. A CAC's mission is to promote and foster safety, healing and justice for children and families. Without effective therapeutic intervention, many children who have experienced trauma may suffer ongoing or long-term adverse social, emotional, developmental and health outcomes.

In those communities that have a CAC with medical services, like the CACs I am honored to oversee with Children's Wisconsin, trained medical providers will complete comprehensive, developmentally-sensitive, trauma-informed medical evaluations and care for children who are suspected of being abused. These specially



trained physicians, nurse practitioners and social workers provide consultations when there are concerns for child abuse, neglect, sexual abuse/assault and sex trafficking. Consultations to the Child Advocacy team may consist of a range of responses appropriate to the concerns, such as phone advice, review of records or images, or a comprehensive in-person evaluation. Our multidisciplinary team provides diagnostic assessments and treatment recommendations. When appropriate, we offer assistance and guidance to children and caregivers in understanding the medical and social issues that have prompted their involvement in an investigation of suspected child maltreatment.

In 2022, nearly 6,400 kids were cared for throughout the state at Children's CACs, medical satellite locations and through our hospital-based child advocacy service. Children's is one of a number of organizations providing child advocacy services across our state. Altogether, thousands of children and their families rely on us to be there to care for and support them during this most sensitive time.

Importantly, CACs provide services to kids and their families without charge and irrespective of insurance coverage. Most of our services are not reimbursable and families going through this most challenging time should not have to face additional financial hardship to seek the care their children need and deserve. These costs are not covered by any other municipal or law enforcement agency.

The federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant is one of the funding mechanisms the state uses to support organizations across Wisconsin that provide direct services to victims of violent crime including conducting forensic interviews, safety planning, community service referrals, counseling, crisis intervention and advocacy. VOCA is funded through fines paid by federal prosecutions and distributed via a funding formula to states. The Wisconsin Department of Justice, Office of Crime Victim Services passes VOCA funds through to nonprofit and government victim service agencies across the state via a competitive grant application process, including Children's Wisconsin's child advocacy centers. As a result of decreased federal fines due to an increase in deferred prosecution agreements, Wisconsin and states across the nation are anticipating a significant reduction in VOCA funding effective on October 1, 2024.

The decrease in VOCA funds will leave programs like ours without the necessary funds to continue offering the comprehensive care we do today. For six of Children's seven CACs, more than 50% of our funding comes from VOCA. These funds support essential personnel including victim advocates, mental health professionals, forensic interviewers and social workers. Across our 7 CACs, VOCA funds support 8 behavioral health clinicians, 9 forensic interviewers and 13 advocates and social workers. Our CACs are facing a minimum 55% reduction in VOCA funds this year which will result in catastrophic cuts to victim services, significantly impact our ability to provide comprehensive care for kids across the state. This could mean fewer forensic interviews which support child safety and sound prosecution decisions fostering more just outcomes, reduced access to mental and behavioral health care resources, fewer advocates to help families navigate their healing journey and reduced social worker support.

I'd like to share one example of a child seen at a Children's Wisconsin CAC recently. Our dedicated staff came in as they do each morning preparing for the kids and caregivers they would serve that day. These aren't just appointments on our schedule but young children and teens coming to us often at the moment of their greatest vulnerability. On this morning, we received a call from law enforcement asking to put a hold on our schedule for interviews and medical evaluations as they were gathering information quickly regarding reports of sexual abuse involving a 5- and 7-year-old.

When the children arrived at the CAC, we learned that the 7-year-old had gotten sick in the car on his way to the CAC and the 5-year-old had sensory needs. Our CAC team jumped into action doing what they do best to meet the physical and emotional needs of each child so they could participate in a forensic interview and medical evaluation. During the forensic interview, the 7-year-old was able to provide details and information



to solidify the execution of an arrest warrant. Injuries were documented during the medical evaluation and each child's health care needs were addressed compassionately, including next steps for follow-up care and connections with a mental health clinician integrated in our services at the CAC. These children were at our CAC for most of the day as multi-disciplinary team partners worked the investigation and identified a relative caregiver to care for the children. Several months later, our forensic interviewer and medical provider were both available to testify in court as fact and expert witnesses.

Our CACs are supported with some philanthropic gifts as well as direct financial support from Children's Wisconsin; last year, Children's invested more than \$1.5 million to support the work of our CACs. The coming reduction in VOCA funds will leave a significant gap in program budgets. This reduction in funds hits CACs especially hard since VOCA is one of the only federal grant sources they qualify to apply for to receive funds for direct services to victims. If you have seen how one CAC is funded, you have only seen how one CAC is funded. The CACs cobble together funding largely from VOCA dollars, some philanthropic dollars and local funding sources and the \$17,000 each receives in annual state funding. More sustainable funding is needed to support this vital service for victims of abuse. This bill will provide funds and allow for increased state support for direct services to care for vulnerable children and teens. This bill will help provide the financial stability to keep these critical services intact and enable us to continue to provide comprehensive services to kids and families with our small and dedicated teams.

SB 877 represents a lifeline, not only for CACs and the kids and families we serve, but also for the many other domestic violence and sexual assault support organizations across our state who rely on VOCA funds as well. This funding will support programs like ours in keeping staff and services available and accessible for those in our community facing adversity and abuse. On behalf of Children's Wisconsin, I encourage your support of this legislation. Thank you for your consideration and I am happy to answer questions now or in the future.

Nila Grahl  
Southeast Region Manager, Racine, Kenosha & Walworth Child Advocacy Centers  
Children's Wisconsin  
[ngrahl@childrenswi.org](mailto:ngrahl@childrenswi.org)

Jodi Bloch  
Director, State & Local Government Relations  
Children's Wisconsin  
608-217-9508  
[jbloch@childrenswi.org](mailto:jbloch@childrenswi.org)

*Children's Wisconsin (Children's) serves children and families in every county across the state. We have inpatient hospitals in Milwaukee and the Fox Valley. We care for every part of a child's health, from critical care at one of our hospitals, to routine checkups in our primary care clinics. Children's also provides specialty care, urgent care, emergency care, dental care, school health nurses, foster care and adoption services, family resource centers, child health advocacy, health education, family preservation and support, mental health services, pediatric medical research and the statewide poison hotline.*

The Fox Cities Victim Crisis Response Team is a non-profit organization that partners with 15 local law enforcement agencies and other emergency personnel to provide on-scene support to community members who have been affected by a crime or traumatic event. We work hard to make sure that no one has to face the trauma of a crisis alone. Our team is available 24/7, 365 days a year to provide individuals with the resources and referrals they need to begin the healing process.

Our mission is to reduce the trauma that victims and those in crisis experience. We understand that untreated trauma can have long-term effects, such as depression, sleep disorders, alcohol or drug misuse, self-harm, and even suicide. The annual cost of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among all civilians, active-duty military personnel, and veterans in the United States is estimated to be as staggering \$232.2 billion. Immediate response to trauma is crucial in reducing these long-term effects, saving both financial burden and, more importantly, lives.

Last year, our program provided assistance to 1,264 people in our communities, helping them through some of the toughest times of their lives. We have responded to incidents such as domestic violence, sexual assault, homicide, suicide, overdose, burglary, fraud, and many others. Our team has been called "angels" and referred to as the "light at the end of a dark tunnel." Last year our volunteers spent a total of 1,170 hours providing on-scene response, equivalent to 48.75 days of crisis response! Additionally, we spent 179 hours on the phone with victims providing critical resources and referrals.

Our organization has an incredible, passionate, and growing team that is committed to helping people. Our volunteers view their role as a lifestyle rather than volunteer work. They take their roles seriously, as demonstrated by the 940 hours of training they completed this year alone. Last year our organization had a total of 19,228 volunteered hours.

As a small agency with only two staff members, we have provided essential services to a population of approximately 232,000. We are proud to have expanded our service area to an additional 67,000 people this year making our total coverage nearly 300,000. However, we are already on a very limited budget, and the organization would likely cease to exist if there is a significant reduction in our VOCA funding, which is our primary source of income. We urge you to consider increasing funding for victims of crime, as it is essential to help those who have been harmed and are in a vulnerable state.

To end we would like to share some of the personal stories of our volunteers but will leave out any identifying information.



Being a Victim Crisis Responder is holding the bloody hand of a grieving mother as she mourns the loss of her children who were tragically taken from her. She did everything she could to save them, but it was too late.

It is sitting beside parents who have been screaming for over 3 hours after finding their teenage daughter who died by suicide. It is sitting with mom and dad as the body bag is unzipped and they kiss their baby girl goodbye for the final time.

It is sitting with a family waiting for emergency personnel to locate their loved one in a pond and hoping they won't have to go until the next day to locate them.

It is sitting in the ER next to the bedside of a woman who was brutally beaten by the man she loved. It is letting her squeeze your hand as her face gets patched back together. It is reminding her of her worth and helping her get out of that relationship before she ends up dead.

It is sitting in a hospital room with a mother and father as they rock their deceased infant for the final time.

It is holding an individual on the side of the road as they overlook their deceased family member who didn't make it out of the car crash alive.

It is sitting with a young victim of a sexual assault as she is interviewed and examined by the SANE nurse. Comforting her as she changes into sweats and underwear given to her by the nurse because her clothing needs to be kept for evidence. Reassuring her that it was not her fault and she did the right thing by calling the police.

It is playing games with 5 young children at the police dept at 3AM after they lost both of their parents. It is waiting for a county worker to arrive and place them into foster care. Being a Victim Crisis Responder means crying all the way to your home because 5 little children no longer have theirs.

These heartbreaking stories are just a small example of the many situations we respond to each and every day.

We don't need them to remember our name, face, or organization, we just want them to remember that they were not alone.

# 2022-2023 STATISTICS

## FOX CITIES VICTIM CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

### VICTIMIZATION TYPE TOTALS



**153**  
VICTIMS EXPERIENCED MULTIPLE VICTIMIZATIONS

9328 Hours on call  
8765 Hours on call lead

**594** Hours on scene of crime calls

**576** Hours on scene with those in crisis

**48** Victims assisted with crime compensation applications



**1170**  
TOTAL ON SCENE HOURS



**100** Hours spent working with post incident victims



**99** Post incident victims called

### CRIME RESOLUTION SUPPORT PHONE CALLS

**232** Victims called **135** Calls connected

**79** Hours phoning victims, helping and connecting them to services



**940**

Hours of training, professional development, & community outreach

**19,228** Total Volunteered hours



**675** Victims of crime served **589** People in crisis served

**1264**

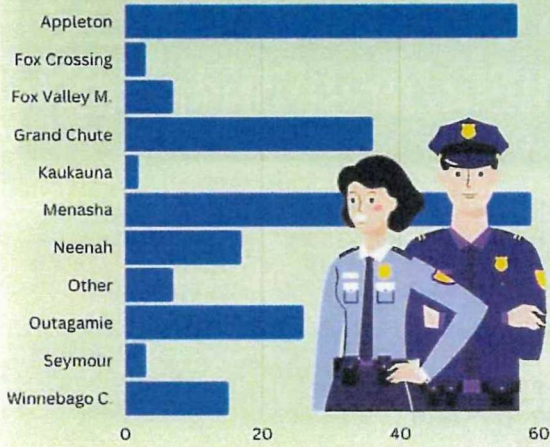
Community members helped



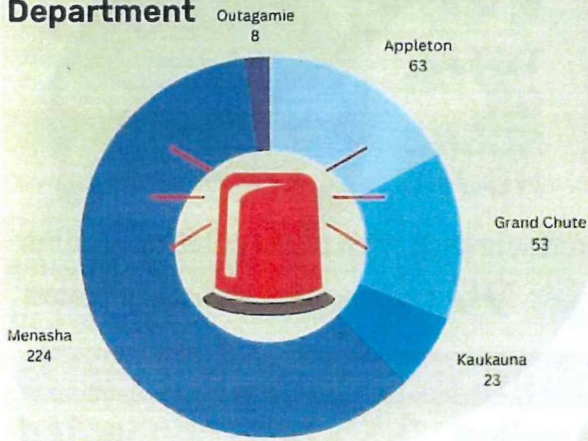


# LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

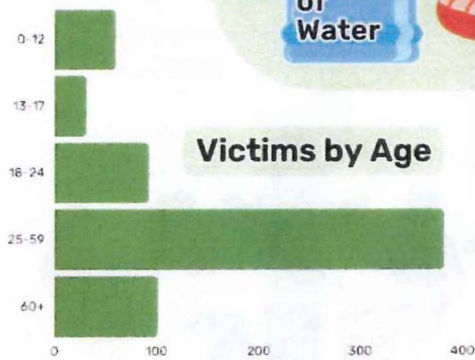
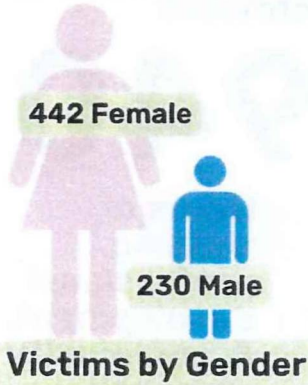
## Calls by Department



## Crime Resolution Support Calls by Department



## CRIME VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS



**6079**

Miles driven by volunteer responders to support victims & those in crisis



# VICTIM SERVICES PROVIDED



## Information & Referral

- 142 Victims provided information about the criminal justice process
- 108 Victims provided information about victim rights, how to obtain notifications, etc.
- 203 Victims provided referral to other victim service programs
- 122 Victims provided referral to other service supports & resources

## Personal Accompaniment

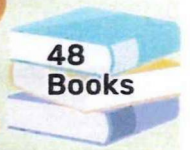
- 11 Victims accompanied to emergency medical care
- 10 Victims accompanied to medical forensic exams
- 49 Law enforcement interview accompaniments
- 17 Assistance for applying for public benefits, return of personal property or effects.
- 1 Intervention with an employer, creditor, landlord or academic institution
- 1 Victim provided transportation assistance
- 13 Victims provided child care assistance

## Emotional Support or Safety Services

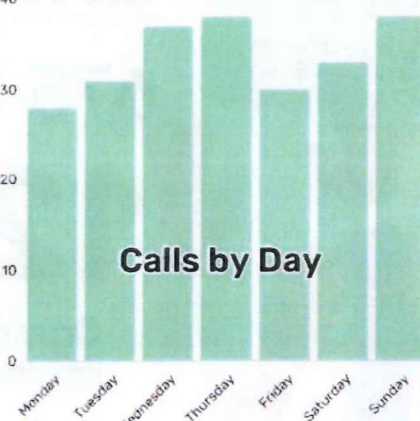
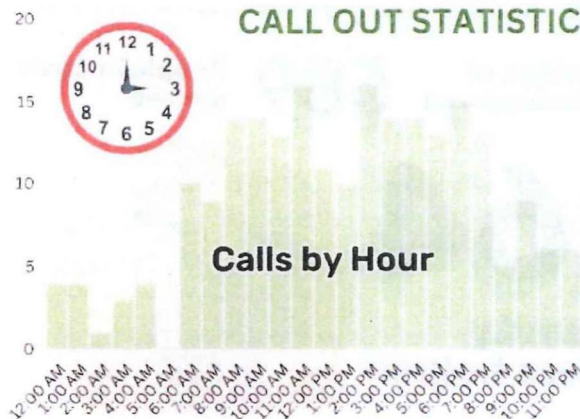
- 455 In person crisis interventions
- 273 On-scene crisis response victims
- 35 Provided with emergency financial assistance
- 14 Provided other emergency justice-related assistance



## ITEMS DISTRIBUTED ON SCENE



## CALL OUT STATISTICS







2000 Domanik Dr., Suite 404  
Racine, WI 53404

(262) 619-1634  
kfetherston@beleafsurvivors.org  
beleafsurvivors.org



1/25/2024

To: Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

My name is Karen Fetherston and I am the Executive Director of BeLEAF Survivors, Racine County's Sexual Assault Services provider (SASP) as designated by the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA). I am here today to voice my concern regarding federal funding reductions that will negatively impact sexual assault services in Racine County.

I have dire concerns about the funding of sexual assault victim services in the state of Wisconsin. The only state funds that Wisconsin allocates for these services is via the Sexual Assault Victim Services (SAVS) grant. SAVS has been woefully underfunded for years to meet the demands of survivors in the state and keep up with the costs of inflation. For a decade, it has remained stagnant while the demand for services has increased as has the cost of providing them to survivors. It is frustrating to have survivors wanting to heal and not have the capacity to assist in their healing.

Today, there is an alarming sense of urgency to increase our SAVS funding source since BeLEAF's primary federal funding source, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant, will be significantly reduced starting in October of 2024. How will this specifically impact BeLEAF Survivors in Racine, Wisconsin? We have been told that the Wisconsin DOJ will only be allocating a maximum amount of \$250,000 per annual VOCA award starting October 1, 2024. We've also been told that the number of grants given out to Wisconsin's victim service providers will decrease from 135 to 52. You can only imagine that those organizations fortunate enough to stay standing after that happens will not only be operating at decreased capacity, but also be asked to take up the slack and serve victims whose counties lost funding altogether.

If BeLEAF is one of the few dozen organizations to be funded, and if we receive the maximum amount of \$250,000 a year, we would be still facing a \$61,000 a year cut. That might not sound like much in terms of the budgets you are accustomed to managing, but it presents us with very difficult choices. After enduring years of lean funding, any fat that was in our budget has already been cut. These next cuts will be painful for staff and survivors. BeLEAF simply cannot absorb VOCA cuts of this magnitude without a reduction in direct services.

One choice could be cutting a position, likely a therapist, despite the mental health crisis in our community and overall lack of providers. BeLEAF currently has two therapists who together provide more than 1,000 free therapy sessions to survivors each year. Even so, we operate with



a waiting list of dozens of people and an average wait time to see a therapist fluctuates between 6 months to a year. Losing one of our two therapists would be devastating.

A different painful choice could be reducing staff hours across the board, deferring pay raises, and asking staff to contribute more for their health benefits. No one is in this work to get rich. It's a calling. Still, I fear this added financial burden could cause key staff to move on to other industries because passion doesn't pay bills. Either of these scenarios would mean the interruption or loss of some of BeLEAF's most essential and FREE direct services: a 24hr crisis line and hospital response to support survivors of sexual violence; clinical therapy and support groups lead by bilingual therapists; and legal, family, and personal advocacy during their healing journey.

Remember, that would be our best-case scenario under the VOCA cuts. At worst, if BeLEAF's proposal isn't deemed competitive enough to make the list of the 52 funded organizations, it would likely close our doors leaving Racine survivors with nowhere to turn at all. These are the things that keep me up at night.

I am excited to be here today to support SB877/AB940 which can bridge the gap that the VOCA crisis presents and ensure, at minimum, the status quo of service provision at Wisconsin's SASPs. It is a ray of hope for organizations like BeLEAF. Some among you might question why the state should need to remedy a fiscal mess that is not their fault. I would argue it's for the same reason that survivors need to address the trauma in their lives that is not their fault- because we can't change what happened, but we can work together to find a way through it.

I know that you care about sexual assault survivors. I hope that you also share my belief that they deserve a place to heal from the trauma they have experienced as well as my mantra that they shouldn't have to pay a dime to heal from what happened to them. This can happen with adequately funded SASPs.

Thank you for your time and any support you can offer.



Karen Bonini Fetherston  
*BeLEAF Survivors- Executive Director*

1/25/2024

My name is Scott Kinderman. I live in Racine. Assembly District 64 and Senate District 22. There are two reasons I am here today. I am asking for your support of SB977 and AB940. These standalone funding bills are of critical importance to non-profit organizations across the state that support survivors of sexual assault, sexual abuse and domestic violence.

Many of these non-profits receive the majority of their funding through grants administered by the Department of Justice (DOJ) of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds that arrive from the federal government. Beginning in October of 2024, the VOCA funding distributed to Wisconsin will be cut by 70%. SB977 and AB940 would increase the Sexual Assault Victim Services (SAVS) funding to offset the loss of operational funds to these service providers.

I cannot stress enough what the loss of funds would mean to the affected non-profits. Currently, the DOJ distributes \$44.5 million yearly across 135 agencies in a three-year grant cycle. Beginning 10/1/2024, that amount will reduce to just \$13 million yearly with the DOJ only able to fund 52 agencies at a maximum grant of \$250,000.

Many agencies currently receive more than \$250,000 per year from VOCA funds. That means the best-case scenario for them will be 'just' a loss of funds down to the \$250,000 cap IF they happen to be one of the 52 agencies that receive funds. The worst-case scenario would be they do not make the cut and lose ALL their VOCA funding. Regardless, the DOJ has already indicated that 83 agencies will lose all of their VOCA funds because they can only support their predicted 52 agencies.

Washington already passed the VOCA Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021. But the additional funds provided in the Act will take several years to begin to filter back to the state level. Without the funds provided in SB977 and AB940, many of the affected agencies would have to either drastically cut the services they can offer or would simply have to close.

Non-profit agencies seldom have adequate funding to achieve their missions. It is the passion of their staff and volunteers that together somehow 'make it work'. But passion can only go so far. Passion doesn't pay wages. Passion doesn't pay for health insurance. Passion doesn't pay for accounting services or keep the lights on. Dollars do.

I have heard some people imply if SB977 and AB940 do not pass that once the funding from Washington returns these agencies could simply start back up. That is an incorrect assumption. The people who worked in the agencies will find other jobs. The connections the staff members had in their communities will be severed. Networks of people who know how to help other people will be lost. The 'tribal knowledge' present in most workplaces of how to get things done will disappear. Even if an agency was able to restart, it would take years for it to return to its previous level of effectiveness. This is time lost for survivors.

I said there were two reasons for my writing today. I have presented the first, which is logical. The next is personal.

I am a survivor. I was molested by two of my mother's boyfriends between the ages of 11 and 12. When I was molested service providers like BeLEAF were either not common or simply did not yet exist.



I know the struggles that survivors face. I know the roadblocks we can encounter in everyday situations if we do not learn the skills to help us cope and process what happened to us. I know the feelings of shame, guilt and inadequacy that deny us so many possible futures. I know the loneliness and isolation that comes with believing no one would understand or even care what I was going through.

At one point – I think I was 14 – I felt so alone that I stood in my kitchen with a serrated knife on my wrist just trying to gather the courage to finally draw it across. Funny, how certain thoughts stick with you. I remember choosing the serrated knife because I thought it would be harder to repair or fix the damage if I was found before I died.

I wish organizations like BeLEAF had been available to me. I carried my pain for 35 years before beginning a journey of healing and I have come far in that journey.

I am now a ‘feet on the ground’ volunteer advocate with BeLEAF. I am regularly on call to go into the emergency room if a survivor is admitted. I also staff their 24-hour crisis line several times per month.

I have seen firsthand the difference that agencies like BeLEAF make for survivors. I have been an advocate now for long enough that I have spoken with some of the callers to the crisis line multiple times.

The first call I ever took was from a person who had no coping skills and was essentially a blubbing blob of emotions. When I talked to them just before Christmas, instead of crying uncontrollably, we had a discussion about making a plan about how to handle their family over Christmas. The difference is simply incredible.

THIS is what agencies like BeLEAF can do for survivors. The difference they make. They help survivors heal. They help survivors pick up the shattered pieces of their lives and recreate something new and stronger. They are a voice for survivors until the survivors can once again find their own voice.

Today, I do the work of advocacy because, for me, there was no voice. I am asking for your support of SB877 so that all these voices across Wisconsin who are working for survivors do not go silent.

Thank you.

Scott Kinderman  
4417 Wood Road  
Mt. Pleasant, WI 53403  
262-676-3546



STATE OF WISCONSIN  
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Josh Kaul  
Attorney General

Shira Phelps, Executive Director  
Office of Crime Victim Services  
17 West Main Street  
P.O. Box 7951  
Madison, WI 53707-7951

(608) 264-9497  
(608) 264-6368 FAX  
(800) 947-3529 TTY

January 25, 2024

**Testimony in support of Senate Bill 877 (information only)**

*Relating to: funding for victim services and domestic abuse services, training for grant recipients, grants to child advocacy centers, and making an appropriation.*

**Want to start out by introducing OCVS –**

- Office within DOJ
- Relevant to today – administer victim services funding across the state

**What does OCVS do:**

- Work directly with victims of crime
- Training, TA, and collaboration with
  - community based victim services orgs
  - county victim witness offices
  - LE
  - Prosecutors
  - Forensic Nurses (SANE nurses)
  - Child Advocacy Centers
  - Statewide victim services coalitions
- In addition -
- OCVS administers tens of millions of dollars in victim services and justice systems funding each year

**We have several Grant Programs administered by OCVS:**

- VAWA STOP – funding for LE, prosecution, courts, and victim services
- VAWA SASP – federal sexual assault victim services
- SAVS – state sexual assault victim services
- CJA – training, TA, and protocol development for child victim services
- VOCA – victims of all types of crimes (part of what brings us here today)

**Summary of VOCA funding and the looming cuts:**

- Wisconsin's largest source of federal funding for victims and survivors of crime
  - Has assisted in sustaining victim services in WI for many years
  - Most notably after a large increase in 2018



- For context:
- VOCA is a formula grant
  - That means that the formula determines how much we get, we cannot ask for more
  - And then, WI DOJ/OCVS is the administering agency of federal VOCA dollars
- We saw a spike in VOCA funding – 2018
  - OCVS to fund agencies at approximately \$44.5 million annually since 2019 (with ARPA dollars as a stopgap as we’ve seen these reductions coming for a long time)
- Shortly after the spike in 2018, national reduction in VOCA funding
  - Resulting in a reduced award for WI
- Although we’ve been able to maintain the \$44.5 million until this year,
- In August 2023 the Office for Victims of Crime at the federal level – notified states that the Crime Victims Fund has continued to reduce
- **How CVF impacts Wisconsin’s VOCA Award**
  - VOCA grants are funded by the Crime Victims Fund (CVF)
  - CVF is a revenue source created by fines and fees in federal cases
  - Over several years, the deposits to the CVF have reduced
  - In turn, this causes decreases to the amount allocated to VOCA grants
- As a result, and if as predicted, Wisconsin will only have \$13 million available through VOCA for victim service organizations across the state beginning October 1, 2024
- \$44.5 million to just \$13 million

As you can imagine, these reductions are devastating. This will impact the entire state.

We now want to highlight why victim services matter and why we are asking for your support.

Victim services are the foundation to empowerment and healing for a survivor of crime.

These services, in partnership with each community in our state, include essential resources such as

- housing
- medical care
- employment opportunities
- mental health care

- legal advocacy
- investigation and prosecution
- ongoing support and care for not only the victim, but also their family
- And the list goes on

Without these necessary resources, other critical systems in our communities will be impacted.

For example –

**Law Enforcement:**

- will not have the benefit of victim advocates to help support victims during an investigation;
- not only is this a right afforded to victims, but victim service providers and law enforcement agree this is best practice ;
- Connecting victims to immediate crisis response services will prove more challenging, as emergency shelters will close, 24-hour victim service crisis lines will be short staffed or cease to operate, and on-site advocate response will be hindered more than it already is;
- We know that investigations and the resulting prosecutions are more successful with advocates present and involved.

**Child Advocacy Centers:**

- are a critical resource for children, their families, and the criminal justice system;
- child victims are often retraumatized by having to tell the story of their victimization over and over, especially when they must testify in court;
- Wisconsin already faces lack of sufficient access to forensic interviewers for children;
- Without continued and additional funding these resources will no longer be available for our children.

**Victim Services Organizations:**

- will be forced to lay off staff;
- emergency shelters will close;
- there will be a staggering amount of victim services professionals without work;
- there will be fewer victim service professionals available to:
  - accompany survivors of sexual assault during a SANE exam;
  - help guide victims through the criminal justice process, putting more pressure and responsibility on prosecutors and law enforcement;



- ensure that victim's constitutionally and statutorily protected rights are respected;
- provide necessary long-term case management and support to victims on their complicated road to recovery;
- provide comprehensive mental health care to victims suffering the deep consequences of trauma.

To close, Wisconsin communities care deeply about victims of crime and understand the necessity of these services.

Victims of crime are our children, our siblings, our parents, our neighbors, our friends, and even us.

We are asking Wisconsin leadership to join us in caring for victims and survivors to ensure they have the support needed in order to heal and move forward with their lives after the trauma of victimization.

Teresa Nienow  
Director of Grant Programs and Training  
State of Wisconsin Department of Justice  
Office of Crime Victim Services  
[NienowTA@doj.state.wi.us](mailto:NienowTA@doj.state.wi.us)  
Phone: (608) 400-5168

Dear Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court

Today, I stand in support of the legislation that will increase funding for sexual assault and domestic violence services. As a survivor of domestic violence and mother of four, I know firsthand the importance of services created from this funding.

One area that I am particularly passionate about is the funding for training police and medical personnel.

I endured years of emotional and physical abuse, in which I documented the threats, abuse, and injuries. Some entries I documented were:

- He threatened to bash my head in with a baseball bat.
- He wanted to throw me through a wall.
- He would put a gun out in sight and tell me that he wanted to kill me and the kids.
- He swerved into oncoming traffic with our baby in the car, saying he'd kill me and our son.
- He told me he wanted to wrap his arms around my neck and choke me until I was lying on the ground.
- He told me he'd bash me with a frying pan.
- Would spit in my face.
- He would hold a toy gun to my head, click it, and say he'd do it if he could get away with it.
- He broke my arm while I was holding the baby.
- He kicked me in the stomach so hard that I flew across the room, landed on my wrist, and broke it.
- He threw me downstairs when I was five months pregnant.
- Grabbed my arms, threw me out of the house, and locked me out at 11:30 at night.
- While yelling at me and telling me he wanted me to die, he put his fist under my chin and lifted me off the ground, then threw me across the room into a chair, leaving my entire arm covered in bruises.
- He said he wanted to stab me in the throat and watch me bleed to death in a pool of blood on the floor.
- He told me all the time that if I left him, he would kill me and our son.

I sought medical attention multiple times for broken bones, sprained wrists, and various bruises. Still, none of the medical professionals or law enforcement officers recognized the signs or questioned my injuries.

Then, I survived my husband strangling me to near death. That night, the Town of Oconomowoc Police were called, but they questioned him and me in the same room. I had no choice but to lie and cover for him out of fear for my life. Law enforcement officers failed to recognize the signs of domestic violence and how to manage the situation.



This monumental funding will help provide training for medical and law enforcement professionals to detect signs of intimate partner violence and understand the severity of strangulation, which is one of the most lethal forms of violence. If someone is strangled by their partner, they are 370% more likely to be killed within the next year by that same partner.

Because of funding like we are discussing today, I was asked to be on the board for the Domestic Violence Resource for Increasing Safety and Connection, which provides training on intimate partner violence risk and lethality assessments. The funding allowed us to spend two years creating training materials for medical and law enforcement professionals to recognize the signs of violence that lead to lethal outcomes. But this work is unfinished, and we still have a long way to go. We need this funding to help medical and law enforcement professionals have the training to recognize and hopefully prevent murders and violence.

Another area that this funding helps is with our work to educate the Wisconsin Family Court system on Domestic Violence and its effects on children. Unfortunately, our Wisconsin family court system is drastically broken.

When I finally escaped him, I handed over my 24 pages containing years of documentation to a Waukesha County DA, and he was charged with nine felonies, including strangulation, stalking, and battery. I also filed for divorce and naively trusted that the Family Court would keep my then 2-year-old son safe. Instead, the people who should have protected my son failed him miserably. Even though my ex-husband was facing a criminal trial and threatened to kill my son before he let me leave, he was granted 50/50 unsupervised visitation.

Even with a restraining order, I was forced to hand my son over to him in person in a gas station parking lot. The family court stated, "We don't need to talk to criminal court." My only choice was to return to criminal court to enforce the no-contact restraining order.

There were times I was so consumed with fear of what he would do to my son, and like most abused women, I felt my only option was to stay with my abuser for fear of what would happen to my child when I was not present.

During sentencing following his criminal trial, I pleaded with the judge to give him at least 14 years in prison so I could raise my son to age 18. I knew if he got out sooner, family court would hand my son over to him. The judge heard me and protected my son by not allowing him to have any contact with my son for ten years following his release from an 8 ½ year prison sentence.

We need this funding to make sure professionals have the tools they need to recognize the signs of violence and protect those who are affected. To save another woman and children from what I endured. I hope we can continue this vital work.

Thank you for taking the time to let me share my story with you today.

# **Chippewa County Sheriff's Office**

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*Travis Hakes, Sheriff*

*Curt Dutton, Chief Deputy*

January 25, 2024

Dear Committee,

I sit here today, to discuss the impacts that Senate Bill 877 and the impacts it has on public safety in Chippewa County. While reviewing this bill, I see it specifically addresses the Chippewa Valley Child Advocacy Center. I will first discuss my experiences with that center.

The Chippewa Valley Advocacy Center provides a service I first experienced as a fresh patrol officer in the Village of Lake Hallie. As a patrol officer in the Village of Lake I was responsible for responding to calls for service and investigating them to completion. As an avid angler, I would best describe this as the rule of, if you catch it, you clean it.

Investigating crimes against children legally require special set of interviewing techniques. Uniformed Law Enforcement can be impactful on interviewing children, there is data collected that will show it can be more traumatic for child victims, as well as the authoritative presence can solicit responses a child may believe they want us to hear, instead of what occurred.

During these interviews the interviewer needs to establish that the child knows the difference between a truth and a lie; as well as the consequences of them. To a certain degree they assess the cognitive level of a child. They are trained to ask open-ended, non-leading questions. These interviews are referred to as forensic interviews.

I wish we lived in a world where children did not have to fear sexual predators, one where children were not exposed to maltreatment or neglect. The harsh reality is that during my career I have had to investigate parents for sexually assaulting, mistreating, and neglecting their own children. Mistreatment of children makes my stomach turn and has scientifically shown to create a cycle of abuse. Many sexual predators were first victims of sexual assault.

The Chippewa Valley Child Advocacy Center is a resource that is used multiple times a day by local law enforcement agencies. Our Office uses the Advocacy Center multiple times a week, and sometimes multiple times a day.

The Center provides an invaluable resource to families and youth in our area. Because of their work we have been able to hold countless child predators accountable for their actions. The work the center does with follow-up care takes steps towards breaking the cycle of abuse. The greatest investment a society can make is in their future, and our children's well-being is that future.

SB 877 also increases the grant funding opportunities for organizations that assist domestic abuse and adult sexual assault victims. Our Office has been making strides to increase our partnership with the Family Support Center. During my career I have also assisted domestic abuse victims to seek shelter at the Bolton Refuge Center in Eau Claire.

32 East Spruce Street Chippewa Falls, WI 54729-2542  
Phone: (715) 726-7701 FAX: (715) 723-6471



# ***Chippewa County Sheriff's Office***

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*Travis Hakes, Sheriff*

*Curt Dutton, Chief Deputy*

In the first part of January 2024, the Chippewa County Sheriff's Office began to complete a Lethality Assessment Program in partnership with the Family Support Center. This program includes a form that we complete on scene with victims of domestic violence. If there are heightened lethality risks associated with domestic violence, our Deputies immediately contact an on-call advocate to speak with the victim. The program also has the Family Support Center attempting contact with all victims of domestic violence that are reported to the Chippewa County Sheriff's Office. These advocates contact victims to support them. Our goal is to stop the cycle of domestic violence and prevent lethal incidents.

I could provide you with countless examples of the exemplary work done by the facilities that we have a partnership with, but out of respect for your time and the victim's privacy I will simply say this:

Senate Bill 877 provides additional funding to help victims of traumatic life altering events in ways that most law enforcement is not adequately capable of. This bill is about public safety, it's about taking care of victims of traumatic incidents.

I am asking that before you vote on this bill, think about every human who has been the victim of one of these vile crimes. Then ask yourself if their safety, and society's future is worth voting for. Please do not turn your back on our victims, vote in support of this bill; our future is worth the investment.

*Sheriff Travis C. Hakes*

32 East Spruce Street Chippewa Falls, WI 54729-2542  
Phone: (715) 726-7701 FAX: (715) 723-6471

Honorable members of the legislature, esteemed colleagues, and compassionate citizens,

Today, I stand before you not just as the voice of Reach Counseling but as the voice of survivors who are grappling with the harrowing aftermath of sexual and domestic violence. Reach Counseling is a lifeline for those navigating the shadows of trauma and a beacon of hope for those affected by violence and seeking justice and healing.

In our vision of a socially just community, every individual impacted by violence is empowered towards healing. Our mission has always been to heal lives and transform communities through our comprehensive services, including trauma counseling, victim advocacy, prevention education, and sex offender treatment.

In 2023, throughout Winnebago, Outagamie and Calumet Counties, we provided <sup>3,985</sup> ~~1,816~~ trauma counseling sessions for survivors and their support systems, our team also provided personal, medical and legal advocacy for 293 survivors, provided prevention education for over 9,000 youth, and helped keep our community safe by reducing the odds of reoffending through <sup>512</sup> ~~512~~ sex offender treatment sessions.

<sup>1,498</sup>  
In their darkest hours, survivors of sexual violence turn to Reach for solace. Picture the survivor who whispered, 'If it weren't for my counselor, I'd probably be dead by now,' a testament to the profound impact of our services and support. Imagine the courage it took for another survivor to find the strength to love themselves again, emerging from the depths of despair with newfound resilience and hope due to the unwavering support they received from their advocate.

Yet, our ability to be that beacon of hope hangs in the balance, the drastic reduction in federal funding under the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) threatens to significantly diminish our capacity to serve those in need. In 2024 & 2025, Reach is poised to lose a minimum of \$420,000 in federal



funding, a substantial part of our financial lifeline for over 25 years. This cut not only impacts Reach but also impacts our entire community, affecting every survivor who turns to us in their most vulnerable moments. The potential ripple effect is profound—a surge in unreported incidents, heightened trauma, and a community less equipped to prevent and confront the impact of sexual and domestic violence.

As you deliberate the fate of funding for organizations like Reach, I implore you to delve beyond the figures and embrace the human stories etched in the fabric of our work. These are not just survivors; they are our neighbors, friends, and family members, each deserving of a chance to reclaim their lives.

Your support in passing this bill will not just be an investment in Reach and similar organizations, but an investment in the safety, healing, and empowerment of countless lives. It's a commitment to a future where the devastating impact of sexual and domestic violence is met with compassion, support and healing.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

[Executive Director's Name] Executive Director, Reach Counseling

Testimony in regard to VOCA Funding Bill (SB 877)  
Thursday, January 25th

Honorable members of the legislature,

I am here before you as the Associate Director of Reach Counseling and, more personally, a survivor of sexual assault. My presence here, my ability to speak to you today, is a living testament to the life-saving impact of organizations like Reach Counseling. If it weren't for organizations like Reach, I might not be here to share my story.

My journey as a survivor began in my freshman year of college, a time that should have been filled with discovery and growth. Instead, it was stained by an experience that left me feeling broken and lost. Over the course of the last eight years, I have endured multiple assaults, each one a stark reminder of the pervasive nature of sexual violence in our society.

After each assault, I was engulfed by a sense of despair so deep that moving forward seemed impossible. The world around me continued its pace, but I was stuck, reliving the trauma, struggling with a pain that felt insurmountable. It was during these darkest moments that services like Reach Counseling became my beacon of hope.

Services like Reach are a lifeline that pulls survivors from the depths of despair. At Reach Counseling, we envision a world where healing is not just a possibility but a promise. We are committed to healing lives and transforming communities. But now, our ability to continue this crucial work is in jeopardy due to the drastic cuts in federal funding from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). Reach is bracing for a loss of at least \$420,000 starting October of this year - a significant blow to our services and, most importantly, to the survivors who rely on us.

Today, I ask you to consider the personal realities of survivors like me. We are more than statistics; we are individuals whose lives have been irrevocably changed by sexual violence. The proposed funding cuts to victim services will not just impact organizations; they will directly affect the lives and recoveries of thousands of survivors. Today, I urge you, as our state's leaders, to take decisive action.

Your support in increasing funding for sexual assault and domestic violence services is crucial. It's not just about sustaining an organization; it's about giving survivors the resources they need to heal and reclaim their lives. Let us ensure that no survivor has to walk their path alone and that organizations like Reach can continue to be a haven for healing and hope.

Thank you for your time and for considering the profound impact your decision will have on the lives of survivors across our state.

Good afternoon committee members.

Thank you for your bravery and action in supporting this effort to coauthor/cosponsor legislation that will increase funding for sexual assault and domestic violence services across the State of Wisconsin.

I am representing the Violence Intervention Project which is in rural Kewaunee County, WI. Our organization has been providing domestic violence, sexual assault services since 1989. These services began with a group of volunteers because of a domestic violence homicide. Our community has been fortunate to have experienced only two other domestic violence homicides. They occurred five months apart in 2019 and during the Stay-at-Home order in 2020.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault programs have displayed resiliency from the beginning of our grassroots endeavors. I have witnessed the strength of programs surviving the pandemic while always serving, making sure victims' safety was always at the forefront of our thoughts with the additional barriers of isolation. Many programs struggled during COVID financially due to the inability to navigate fundraising activities. Some programs were the recipients of COVID supplemental funds which have now been exhausted. Now programs must attend to the next budget crisis.

The Department of Children and Families restructured the grant funding process for 2022 by making it a competitive process. The Violence Intervention Project did receive funding but at a decrease from years prior in the amount of \$30,000. We are not alone in this decrease. Programs now need to focus on navigating the VOCA decrease to victim service programs in Wisconsin. For our organization this could potentially be another loss of \$472,000. These funds are simply not obtainable to make up in fundraising activities and donation requests in our small rural community.

We as victim programs have always carried the burden of how we will meet our annual budgets. We now need others to help carry this burden of making sure individuals/families in Wisconsin have access to competent services that they deserve following a victimization. We need to remember that victims are not asking for crimes to be committed against them, these are involuntary crimes of the most intimate nature being perpetrated against them.

I began this work 24 years ago and my wage was \$7 per hour and no additional fringe benefits were offered.

The VOCA funding announcement in 2019 encouraged programs to increase staff wages. A resource was provided to guide programs on the increase by the Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse: Operating a Domestic Abuse Program a Fair Minimum document. VOCA Funds made it possible for victim service programs to finally be a bit competitive and equitable in



Throughout the action of a sexual assault, one's voice is silenced. Imagine being in an environment where something so violent and intimate is taken from you or a child and your ability to communicate effectively is non-existent. The shame and guilt that follow the assault keeps one silenced for the fear of being made to leave the country you call home, maybe even separating you from your children due to documentation status. If the perpetrator of the sexual assault is an intimate partner, how will you make ends meet, where will you find employment, who will watch your children, where will you live, how will you find diapers for your baby and how will you stay safe. Not only do you feel isolated and alone because of living in a predominantly white community, if you report, you may be ostracized among the people of your own culture due to the structure of unity within the Latinx community.

The Violence Intervention Project has made it a priority to provide linguistic and culturally competent services to individuals within the Latinx community. VOCA funds support two bilingual positions that can assist in the elimination of language and cultural barriers. The Violence Intervention Project is the only service provider in Kewaunee County that has Spanish speaking in-person services.

VOCA funds support advocate positions that provide services to children and youth. Advocates have established relationships with schools to be able to provide individual and support group services in schools settings during free periods and lunch breaks. This increases youths access to services eliminating barriers of parental schedules and after school activities. Last year advocates provided services to 86 youth independent of parents seeking services.

The Violence Intervention Project does not have an emergency shelter like there is in many communities. Our organization utilizes hotels for short-term solutions, however there are many limitations to a brief hotel stay. Organizationally, we utilize VOCA funds to assist with the hotel stays. The Violence Intervention Project does have a Transitional Living Facility that provides services to individuals and families at risk of becoming homeless due to domestic violence or sexual assault. This program is a goal-oriented program that assists victims in transitioning to independent living and self-sufficiency. This program can provide housing for up to nine individuals. The Transitional Living Program Coordinator is VOCA funded as well as some of the expenses to offset the cost of the program.

In 1988, as a 14-year-old child I was raped by a friend's father. There were not advocacy services in every community, such as the community I lived in at the time. The community that I was raped in had services but unfortunately, I was ineligible for services because of county boundaries. Thankfully my parents had the resources to be able to provide me with the help that I needed to overcome the trauma that I experienced. Healing should not be based on privilege.

The absence of VOCA funding is going to be devastating to our communities, our families, our State and our Nation. There are going to be children and families that don't have access to programs within their own communities. There is going to be programs that don't have the

(No subject)

Chasity Bolden <Chasity@astop.org>

Thu 1/25/2024 9:02 AM

To:Isabel Williston <Director@astop.org>

I suffered for years...I stayed quiet for even more. 17yrs to be exact. I know now, in my heart, if I would have known about Astop sooner, my suffering would have ended sooner. I had no one, or so I thought. There isn't 1 staff member I have had contact with there, that has put me off ease. With what I've been through that is a hard feat. They are dedicated, and understanding, they make a difference! There would be two children without a mother, a sister without her only other sister, a father without his eldest I felt so broken I had almost been that selfish. All my sessions with my counselor Michele, Chasity, my legal advocate who accompanied me on many occasions now regarding court...They helped build my courage to speak up, they had my back and still do to this day. I am still healing, I am still in need of counseling, I need Chasity for upcoming court dates. My children have upcoming therapy appointments. Astop offers that for us. I know now that I am not alone, we are not alone...imagine the other survivors like me out there. Sexual assault survivors are 10X more likely to commit suicide. I used to feel useless, I have been in other therapy for years now. Which, I will point out that I had to wait 6 months for an appointment with a psychologist. Astop was available within a week. Without them, I would not be writing this. Astop helped me realize that I am more than what happened to me.

Astop helped me realize that I am more than a victim. ASTOP helped me rebuild my strength and courage. They taught me I had a voice. Out of all the choices to cut funding, why would anyone choose the one that saves lives? Every 68 seconds an American is sexually assaulted. 1 out of every 6 women, 1 in 33 men. That's a lot of broken people in need of help. Astop offers that to people, it could be your favorite cashier at the grocery store, your grandma's favorite CNA, your 1st grade teacher, or your daughter, grandson or sister....

My family didn't know my abuse was that bad, and I was a master at silence and fake smiles. My children were in the room 20ft away the 1st time they didn't know. People like me need a safe place of no judgment, empathy and understanding hearts most of us won't last the 6 month wait.....

Chasity Bolden (she/hers/her)

Victim Legal Advocate  
ASTOP Sexual Abuse Center  
21 S. Marr Street  
Fond du Lac, WI 54935  
920.926.5395

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## testimony

Dancing Dime <doodlebug101.ds@gmail.com>

Tue 1/23/2024 1:42 PM

To: Isabel Williston <Director@astop.org>; Stephanie Crum Steinfort <Stephanie@astop.org>

Hi My name is Deb. I am a survivor of domestic violence. I was hurt mentally, physically, spiritually, and financially in every way. I didn't see a way out or a way to heal (I felt like I deserved it.). ASTOP has helped me heal. They are also helping me go through (the paperwork and emotional issues) with a divorce. **ASTOP is committed to continuing to serve survivors and their loved ones while continuing to advocate for change.** My confidence has changed so much I now stand a whole inch taller. I want emphasize the critical importance of funding for all victim services. If you need more, let me know.

Sincerely , Deb



## FW: FW: Urgent ASTOP Support Request

Michelle Boodry <michelle@astop.org>

Fri 1/19/2024 4:33 PM

To:Isabel Williston <Director@astop.org>

Michelle Boodry, LPC, EMDR trained  
Therapist

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ASTOP Sexual Abuse Center  
21 S Marr St Fond du Lac, WI  
920-926-5395

**From:** Lori Lasee <laseelori@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, January 19, 2024 4:29 PM  
**To:** Michelle Boodry <michelle@astop.org>  
**Subject:** Re: FW: Urgent ASTOP Support Request

I was at a point in my life where I was hopelessly living in silence. Advocates coming to the psychward saved my life and helped me feel heard and they convinced me that I was not to blame and this can happen to anyone. No one is smarter than the grooming process and ASTOP has been providing me services since 2017. It does not go away, but rather you have to learn to carry it with you for the rest of your life. Many times people are triggered and things sneak up at the most inconvenient times. I am grateful for the support that I have thrived from.

On Fri, Jan 19, 2024, 1:13 PM Michelle Boodry <michelle@astop.org> wrote:

Michelle Boodry, LPC, EMDR trained  
Therapist

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ASTOP Sexual Abuse Center  
21 S Marr St Fond du Lac, WI  
920-926-5395

**From:** Isabel Williston <Director@astop.org>  
**Sent:** Friday, January 19, 2024 10:56 AM  
**To:** Stephanie Crum Steinfort <Stephanie@astop.org>; Michelle Boodry <michelle@astop.org>; Chasity Bolden <Chasity@astop.org>  
**Subject:** Urgent ASTOP Support Request

Dear ASTOP Supporter,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Isabel Williston, and I serve as the Executive Director of ASTOP, a Sexual Abuse Center dedicated to providing essential services to survivors and their loved ones. I am reaching out to you today with a matter of utmost urgency regarding the potential loss of 71% of our yearly funding due to changes in the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). VOCA is a revenue source created by fines and fees in federal

To: Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
From: Disability Rights Wisconsin (Contact: Lisa Hassenstab, Public Policy Manager, [lisah@drwi.org](mailto:lisah@drwi.org))  
Date: January 25, 2024  
Re: **SB877** - relating to: funding for victim services and domestic abuse services, training for grant recipients, grants to child advocacy centers, and making an appropriation

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is a private non-profit organization that protects the rights of people with disabilities statewide, with a mission to advance the dignity, equality, and self-determination of people with disabilities. DRW serves as the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for the State of Wisconsin, charged with protecting the rights of children and adults with disabilities and keeping them free from abuse and neglect. With this mission and charge, DRW supports SB877.

People with disabilities are impacted by crime at a significantly higher rate than people without disabilities. According to recent U.S. Census data, people with disabilities account for approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population, but between 2009-2019 the rate of violent crime against people with disabilities was twice that of people without disabilities, and from 2010-2014 the rate of serious violent crime, including sexual assault, against people with disabilities was more than three times higher than the age-adjusted rate for people without disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, people with disabilities are more likely to “experience more severe victimization, experience it for a longer duration, suffer multiple episodes of abuse, and have a larger number of perpetrators.”<sup>2</sup> Factors that contribute to this include but are not limited to: presumed lack of credibility, isolation and segregation, and increased exposure to perpetrators.<sup>3</sup> Crimes against people with disabilities are also significantly underreported; findings have shown less than half of violent crimes against people with disabilities were reported to police.<sup>4</sup> Fear of losing independence or of institutionalization, lack of knowledge about healthy sexuality or safety, and the lack of an effective criminal justice system response can all contribute to this underreporting.

All these factors – and more – showcase the critical need for continued funding for services for Wisconsinites, particularly Wisconsinites with disabilities, impacted by domestic violence and sexual assault. Projected cuts to funding for these services would have devastating impacts on

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<sup>1</sup> [How-safe-are-americans-with-disabilities-web.pdf \(endabusepwd.org\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

the ability of recipient organizations to serve these individuals, a disproportionate amount of whom are likely people with disabilities.

Disability Rights Wisconsin does have a [Victim Advocacy Services program](#) supported in part by VOCA funding, and like other organizations testifying on this bill is facing a huge cut in funding for this program. DRW is not, however, testifying in support of this bill as an organization that would receive funding as a result of the bill; our funding comes through a program not included in this legislation. DRW is in support of this legislation because of the incredible work done by our partner organizations to support Wisconsinites impacted by domestic violence and sexual abuse, including many who have disabilities. The ability of these organizations to maintain – and ideally grow – their services will continue to help break down the barriers faced by Wisconsinites, including many with disabilities, seeking support and services during a difficult and critical point in their lives. DRW does hope additional state funding can also be allocated to fund programs like ours which serve victims of crime but that wouldn't see funding relief through what is currently proposed in this bill.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and this bill, and please don't hesitate to reach out with questions or for more information.



TO: Senate Committee on Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
FROM: Lauren Hamvas & Abby Bar-Lev Wiley, Legal Action of Wisconsin;  
Megan Lee, Judicare Legal Aid  
DATE: 01/25/2023  
RE: SB 877's Positive Impact on Our Clients & Client Communities

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of SB 877. We are deeply grateful to help raise awareness of the scope of devastation wrought by the VOCA cuts, and to support this bill that would provide critical financial support to so many important organizations in the DV/SA community.

We are here representing Legal Action of Wisconsin and Judicare Legal Aid. Our two non-profit law firms work together to ensure that all low-income Wisconsinites—from Milwaukee to Ashland—receive high-quality, free legal assistance for their civil legal problems. A large portion of our work is funded by VOCA, including our Elder Rights Project, which represents elderly victims of crime, our Family Law work representing victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in divorce proceedings and orders for protection, and our Crime Victims' Rights project, which represents victims of crime who otherwise often lack a voice in criminal proceedings. In fact, our collaborative, statewide Crime Victims' Rights Project submitted an appeal and argued the case in front of the Wisconsin Supreme Court to ensure that victims' private mental health records could not be examined and unfairly used against them in a criminal trial—and we won, overturning long-standing precedent.

We are speaking here today in favor of SB 877 because our survivor-clients deeply depend on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (DV/SA) agencies. VOCA funding cuts are already being deeply felt across the DVSA landscape, including in areas like safety planning, community service referrals, counseling, crisis intervention, and legal services. VOCA cuts will decimate these critical lifelines—including our work providing legal representation to survivors—if the State does not help cover the gap.

There are many pieces to the puzzle that a survivor must navigate in the course of their journey from being victimized to finding healing. There is no single navigator walking that individual through the steps. Organizations rely on each other to help ensure that a survivor has the information they need to easily and confidently continue their healing journey. Tragically, the VOCA cuts mean that many survivors will now fall through the cracks, and it is not certain that they will be able to find and obtain the help they need. This bill would provide a critical support to many DV/SA agencies that our clients—and our firms—rely upon, to ensure that they can continue to help survivors through a crisis.

While SB 877 does not include legal services, legal aid is another critical resource facing insurmountable gaps in coverage due to funding cuts. Together, Legal Action and Judicare are the primary sources of lawyers for victims of crime, and we work collaboratively with DV/SA agencies, law enforcement, and DA's offices to provide necessary legal help to victims of crime. To help better understand the scope of the VOCA cuts, we wanted to share just a few client stories with you.

*Helping Sharon navigate a criminal sexual assault case as a survivor*

In our work in the statewide crime victims' rights project, we often interact with different VOCA-funded partners. Our client, Sharon, was a woman in her 50s who had been sexually assaulted in her home. During the assault, Sharon experienced injuries that required multiple surgeries. After the assault, Sharon sought services through her local DV/SA agency. Sharon worked with an advocate to seek supportive services and help find stability after a devastating trauma. This advocate worked with other community agencies to connect Sharon



with crucial supports to stabilize her employment, get access to medical care, and secure her mental health treatment. We got involved with the case to help Sharon protect her mental health records within the criminal case and to help her better understand and advocate for her rights as a crime victim. With Sharon's permission, we collaborated with her advocate to best meet her needs. Her advocate helped get Sharon to doctor appointments, surgeries, and court hearings in the criminal case. I worked with the advocate to ensure that Sharon's concerns were being addressed and her needs were being met. Through this collaboration, we were able to empower Sharon to regain control in her life and begin the difficult process of healing after a sexual assault that left deep mental and physical injuries.

#### *Helping Tara divorce an abusive spouse*

Another one of our attorneys worked with a rural DV/SA agency to help walk a client, Tara, through leaving her abusive spouse. Tara and her young children were still living with her abuser when she started working with Judicare and her local DV/SA agency to seek guidance on leaving. Tara's spouse controlled her mail, phone, and email, severely restricting her access to help. Fortunately, Judicare was able to work with Tara's advocate at her local DV/SA agency to connect with Tara when she was outside of her husband's close supervision. Tara wanted to leave her abusive spouse but was afraid that he would try to get her arrested for kidnapping if she fled with the children. We provided Tara with legal advice about leaving and starting the divorce process, in collaboration with her advocate. Tara was able to move herself and her children out of the house, into a safe situation with relatives. Tara is now in the process of getting divorced from her abusive spouse and on the path the rebuilding her life for herself and her children.

#### *Helping Morty obtain a restraining order & return home*

Morty is elderly and disabled. He was being physically abused by his live-in girlfriend. Morty did not have transportation or a phone to seek help. The local DV agency moved him into a hotel for temporary safety and helped Morty get connected with us for legal assistance with a restraining order. While the agency arranged for a phone for Morty, they coordinated communication between Morty and Legal Action so that he could prepare for the upcoming hearing. We were able to obtain the Restraining Order for Morty and remove his abuser from the home so that he could return safely. Without the coordination between the agencies, he may have remained in an unsafe, abusive situation.

#### *Bypassing an abusive spouse to empower Marcy*

Another former client, Marcy, had been in an abusive marriage for over 40 years. Marcy has significant physical disabilities and is functionally mute. This made her heavily reliant on her husband for care, which he used as a means to control her. The only time he would allow her to be separated from him was for her monthly counseling appointments (where he remained in the waiting room). The domestic violence agency staff coordinated her counseling appointments with us and would help us sneak in through a back door, so that her husband was unaware that she was meeting with us during a part of the session. Thanks to the DV agency, we were able to empower Marcy with the information and assistance that she needed, including eventually removing her husband as healthcare power of attorney, his access to her healthcare records, and we were able to give her advice about divorce and restraining orders.

There are many ways that legal services helps victims of crime, but we could not be effective advocates without the critical work done by the many DV/SA agencies for which SB 877 would keep the lights on. Thank you to the advocates who worked on this bill and to the legislature and Committee for considering how the bill would benefit crime victims and DV/SA agencies across the state.



### **JENNIFER M. PAINE TESTIMONY SUMMARY**

*You don't understand - My dad sold me. I have been going from place to place my whole life.* This statement could have been from the old slavery era. But it is not. It is from a client in 2023, sitting in an office with Gwen and me, describing how she ended up at our shelter. Exhausted. Broken. And looking for help. I will call her Lynn to protect her confidentiality. Lynn sat with us holding a plate of chicken she managed to find at a donation table outside, shifting from side to side to relieve the pain in her legs from injuries she sustained being brutally raped on a car a few days prior. She described, in detail, being sold by her father, a notorious pimp in Chicago, to her uncle, just barely a teenager, and spending 30 years of her life going up and down the I-94 corridor as a sex worker. She told us about her children and her grandchildren and losing contact with them. She told us about her goals to get stable housing. She told us about her inability to pay for basic medical care, her inability to find a therapist willing to work with her, her distrust of all men. I sat there stunned and searching for ways to help her. It was like something out of a movie.

Except - it was not. Lynn's story is not a one-off from a client with unique circumstances who happened to come to Horizons. For us, this is an every day, every single day of the year, client story. In the last week, we have had 3 calls from trafficked victims looking for help.

My name is Jennifer Paine. I am the executive director for Horizons. Prior to coming to Horizons, I sat on the board for IPV nonprofits in Michigan, and I litigated cases for free for IPV victims and their children. Horizons is the oldest IPV shelter and full services provider in Wisconsin. We have been doing this work since 1968 underground, by two women, and since 1976 as an incorporated nonprofit. Our founders started with their own money - there were no grants for our program. And we have been fighting for proper funding ever since.



We are always at capacity in our shelter – and we provide hotels for incoming clients and never turn them away. Our numbers have skyrocketed in the last year. And it keeps going. Bluntly put, we are scared. If we do not have proper funding for our programs, we will cancel them.

The result will be catastrophic to our survivors and the community we support. We are the only DV shelter in Kenosha. Please, do not let that happen.

Let me tell you about Lucas. And yes, I am using a different name for him, as well. Lucas is four years old. I met him my first week at Horizons. One of the things about being a nonprofit director is, you fill in the gaps – often. If someone calls in sick, I am there. If the hotline is busy, new callers come to me. If a client needs to be admitted to our shelter at 2am and my staff cannot leave the shelter unattended, I show up. If we are crowded at shelter and understaffed, I am working the shift.

When I saw Lucas and his mom briefly at our office, their first day with us, I said hello and gave Lucas a little stuffed animal. It was a brief exchange as I was headed to a grant meeting. Later that day, I stopped to the shelter to visit my staff. Not only did Lucas remember me, he remembered my name and came running toward me. *Ms. Jennifer, Ms. Jennifer!* Here he is, running down the hall toward me, holding up his arms, in one hand a bag of used sheets, in the other a pillow. *Ms. Jennifer! Is that my room?* He stopped in front of an open bedroom, pointing with the hand holding the pillow. I responded, *Looks Like It!* He hugged me, except he was so short he was just hugging – clinging to – my legs. I could feel tears on his cheek running down my legs. *Thank you,* he said.

And that is when it hit me. This is the littlest victim of domestic violence. Lucas had literally no control over anything in his life. He was happy just to have a bed and used sheets to sleep in. There is no way I will ever let him or the thousands of victims in our state like him ever, ever go back to an abusive home.

Horizons' mission is to provide support, shelter, advocacy, education, training, and healing services to victims of sexual and domestic abuse, their

families, their children (who are often primary or secondary victims), and the community. We envision communities fully engaged to provide safety and to give voice to all affected by domestic abuse and sexual assault, while creating the social change necessary to address its root causes. Our mission is achievable through survivor-centered work that includes strategic partnerships and collaboration. As advocates for social justice, we embrace the voices of diverse communities. We will consider any non-violent strategy that is consistent with our mission to prevent and eliminate domestic abuse and sexual abuse.

Victims of domestic and sexual violence are often unfamiliar with advocacy services. Community-based advocates, such as those at Horizons, offer free and confidential supportive services. These include systems advocacy (assistance with the legal process, medical care, reporting to law enforcement), one-on-one advocacy, group support, crisis intervention, referrals to our 24/7 emergency shelter, and information and referrals to community resources. An advocate's role is to listen to victims, provide unbiased information and options about the different courses of action available, and to support the victim's choices. Participation in the criminal justice process, filing a law enforcement report, and/or leaving one's abuser is not required in order to access advocacy services.

Horizons also provides mental health treatment and social services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and their families. This includes: accompaniment to medical appointments; free therapy; support groups; prevention courses, also known as batterer intervention classes; and coordination of benefits, such as food assistance.

Horizons continues to provide emergency shelter, its first service, and has expanded housing services to include transitional, subsidizing housing, hotel vouchers, and relocation assistance.

Horizons provides outreach and training to the community often. This includes trainings to law enforcement, hospitals, and other social service agencies; inservices and support groups to schools and churches; and outreach for events like Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Sexual Assault Awareness Month; Human Trafficking Awareness Month; and Teen Dating Awareness Month.

Nationwide and here in Wisconsin, rates of IPV overall are increasing. In 2023, our trafficked client number in particular went up by three times. Our overall client load increased by 38% --while our budget remained the same, and for 2024 is estimated to go down by 40.2%. More on that later.

The question is, WHY?

We know why traffickers traffic – bad people do bad things. A lot of times for money. Because they can. Spending time analyzing the *why* for traffickers is wasting time.

The focus needs to be on *what our community is not doing that facilitates trafficking*. This is what Lynn meant sitting in our office this year. While anyone can be victimized, from our experience on the frontlines as a shelter and victim services provider, there are common factors that make victims more likely to be trafficked. They are:

Lack of affordable housing

Lack of good wages

Lack of affordable childcare during normal work hours

Lack of affordable food

Lack of affordable medical care

Lack of therapy

Lack of affordable treatment for substance abuse, a co-occurring abuse tactic

As examples:

Housing: Between 2012 and 2023, the Wisconsin median home sale price jumped by more than 150%, according to a report from the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Wages: Minimum wage has remained \$7.25/hour since 2018 according to the US Labor Law Center.

Childcare: According to a report by the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the average annual cost of Child Care for a 4-year-old in Milwaukee County is



\$12,142, while the cost for an infant is \$16,236. Both are higher than the national average. A person making minimum wage fulltime makes less than the average cost of childcare.

Food: According to the USDA in October 2023, all food prices are predicted to increase 5.8 percent, with a prediction interval of 5.5 to 6.1 percent.

In other words, lacking the necessities of life makes victims more vulnerable to trafficking. And the lack of affordability necessities makes it even harder for them to get out.

The same is true for many IPV victims – they do not have the resources to get out of their abusive relationship, and agencies like ours are looking at budget cuts for those resources we do have.

The state is not properly funding these programs.

VOCA cuts are coming. We stand to lose, at a minimum, 40.2% at Horizons. And despite a surplus in our state budget of over \$4 billion, none of our requested increases in funding for IPV programs passed.

This means, the DOJ will only be able to award \$13 million per year beginning October 2024. This will be the next competitive VOCA cycle for programs. That will be a 3-year grant cycle.

Put into perspective:

- Currently, the DOJ awards \$44.5 million per year, spread amongst 135 agencies.
- That is a 70% reduction in the amount DOJ will be awarding for VOCA this fall.
- DOJ is expecting they will have to have a cap of \$250k on grant awards. Around half of all current VOCA recipients are above that cap amount of \$250k.
- The DOJ will fund 52 agencies across WI (as opposed to 135 currently).

- VOCA is formula-based funding, meaning we can't simply ask for more VOCA funding at the federal level.

As another example, earlier this year, the DOJ requested a modest increase from \$2 million to \$9 million for sexual assault victim services programming, SAVS, where most of the funding for trafficked victims comes. Governor Evers included an increase to \$7 million in his proposed budget. It did not pass. This means, we have \$2 million for the entire state's programming.

Put into perspective:

- o SAVS is the only state program that funds sexual violence prevention initiatives and direct services for survivors and their families.

- o SAVS is currently funded at \$2.235 million annually, DV services are currently funded at \$12.4 million annually. Those funding levels have been relatively static for the past decade.

- o The static nature of funding has been a barrier to expanding culturally specific programs, who are providing services to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) survivors, often without adequate funding.

With the expected reductions in VOCA funding, now is the time for Wisconsin to make an investment in sexual and domestic violence services and prevention. Increases for both DV and SA funding were included in the Governors 23/25 executive budget. Unfortunately, those increases were removed in the final budget adopted by the legislature. Our ask: please, pass this bill.

It should surprise no one that clients like Lynn come to us exhausted. We are exhausted, too. And the clients will not stop coming. We need funding to help them.

Let me give you some stats from EndAbuse and WCASA to put this problem into perspective:

Sexual violence is a significant problem. In Wisconsin:

- o 440,000 women have experienced rape in their lifetime (1 in 5)

- o 787,000 women have experienced contact sexual violence (1 in 3)
- o 404,000 men have experienced contact sexual violence (1 in 6)

In 2022, 96 individuals died in Wisconsin due to domestic violence at a rate of approximately one death every 3.8 days. 1 in every 6 domestic violence homicides in the United States happens in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin ranks **13th state in the US** for DV related homicides in 2021  
In 2022, our rates increased by 20% statewide  
This was the **highest rate** increase in 20 years  
And we saw a **200% increase in rural areas, like West of the I Kenosha**

And for our agency:

Trafficking: 30 - more than 1 alt. weeks

Shelter Alone: 5387 nights and 2012 clients

38% increase since 2022 for sheltered clients

Overall Clients: 3051

Overall Female client number: 97%

Children: 44% increase since 2022 for sheltered clients

BIPOC client number: 33%

Low to no income client number: 93%

According to Governor Evers, Wisconsin is spending more than ever to support law enforcement and EMS - upwards of a 20% increase in some areas. That is great! But where are they going to put their DV and SA victims, when our shelters are closing?

I implore all of you- spend one day working in a shelter and see what we deal with on the frontlines every day. There will not be a doubt in your mind that legislation for proper funding needs to pass. If we do not properly fund programs to treat victims, we will fail them, and that burden will fall on the entire state. Please let us help victims like Lynn and Lucas.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer M. Paine JD

Executive Director

Women and Children's Horizons



## VOLUNTEER SERVICES

Women and Children's Horizons' mission is supported by many community volunteers. Volunteers are an essential component of WCH, and we value the contributions of time and effort of each one of our individual volunteers, as well as corporations and community groups. All volunteers receive agency and task-specific training.

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

- Direct client services (internships)
- Shelter upkeep and assistance
- Nifty Thrifty retail store
- Community outreach
- Special events

Visit our website to fill out a volunteer application or email our volunteer coordinator at:

[volunteercoordinator@wchkenosha.org](mailto:volunteercoordinator@wchkenosha.org)

## NIFTY THRIFTY RESALE SHOP

WCH is funded in part by proceeds from our resale shop, Nifty Thrifty. Donations from the community make our thrift shop possible. WCH clients are given vouchers by WCH advocates to shop at Nifty Thrifty.

### Nifty Thrifty Resale Shop

4200 39th Ave - Kenosha, WI 53144  
(262) 605-3326 - Tues - Sat 10am - 5:30pm  
June - Sept. open until 7pm on Tuesday



## WCH SERVICES

- 24-hour help line - 1-800-853-3503
- Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocacy
- 24-hour advocate response to hospitals and law enforcement agencies
- 24-hour emergency shelter for women and children
- Legal advocacy and restraining orders
- Transitional Living Program
- Children's Program
- Safe Exchange
- Hispanic Services
- Certified Batterers' Treatment Program
- Food, clothing, and household good pantries
- Referrals to community resources
- Support groups
- Parenting classes
- Family Intervention Program

Women and Children's Horizons was established in 1976 and is the oldest incorporated shelter in Wisconsin.

*All victim services are free  
and confidential. Services are provided  
in English and Spanish.*

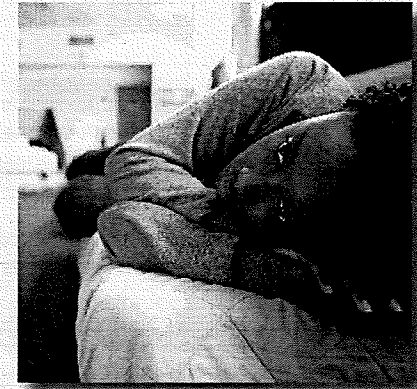
WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S  
**HORIZONS**  
*Advocating for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence*



Proud to be a United Way Agency

This brochure is supported in part by Victims of Crime Act Subgrant awarded by Wisconsin Department of Justice Office of Crime Victim Services under a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the grantor agencies.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S  
**HORIZONS**  
*Advocating for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence*



Providing support, shelter,  
advocacy, education,  
training and healing services  
to victims of sexual and  
domestic abuse, their  
families and  
the community

2525 63rd Street Kenosha, WI 53143  
Administrative and Support Services Hours:  
Monday-Friday 8:30am - 5pm  
Phone: 262-656-3500  
Fax: 262-656-3402  
[wchkenosha.org](http://wchkenosha.org)

24-Hour Help Line:  
262-652-9900 • 800-853-3503



## EMERGENCY SHELTER

- Shelter houses up to 35 women and children
- Available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week
- 30-day stay to establish/maintain safety and begin living an abuse-free life
- Victims learn goal/safety planning and daily life skills in individual and group settings

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM

- Safety planning
- Emergency phones
- One-on-one advocacy services
- Group support services

## SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAM

- Accompaniment to exams or police reporting
- One-on-one advocacy services
- Individual Therapy

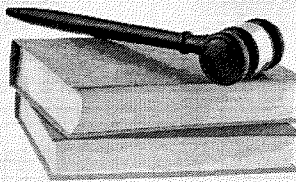
## HUMAN TRAFFICKING SERVICES

- One-on-one advocacy services
- Referrals to community resources
- Legal Advocacy and Attorney Referral

## LEGAL ADVOCACY PROGRAM

WCH advocates provide services to assist victims in navigating legal matters. Advocates are **NOT** lawyers, but are available for support, information and assistance regarding:

- Information on court processes: including criminal justice and family court (divorce, legal separation, and child custody)
- Legal rights
- Court accompaniment
- Restraining orders
- Completing legal forms
- Translating forms/letters/documents



## BATTERERS' TREATMENT PROGRAM

The Circle of Change is a 26-week program for men and women who have used violence in their relationship and wish to change. Available for men and women, and for Spanish-speaking men. Groups are held weekly. Sessions are two hours long. Cost of treatment is the responsibility of the client.

## Group Topics

Defining violence, communication, managing conflict, sexual respect, ending relationships respectfully, effects of violence, effects on children, modeling respect and empathy, accountability, jealousy, anger, dishonesty, self-care/stress management, and redefining masculinity.

## OTHER SERVICES

### *Children's Services*

- One-on-one advocacy services
- Group support services

### *Family Intervention Program*

Together with employees of Kenosha Human Development Services (KHDS) and WCH, assistance is provided to families who have been identified by outside resources as "at risk" in their homes. WCH provides the following services for these families:

- One-on-one advocacy services
- Referrals to community resources
- Safety planning
- Legal advocacy
- Education regarding sexual and domestic violence
- Shelter services
- Support groups for non-offending caregivers
- Safe Exchange services, pertaining to accompaniment to custody exchange drop-offs and pick-ups

### *Underserved Population Services*

Advocacy for older adults, LGBTQ adults, and disabled adults.

- One-on-one advocacy services
- Support groups





January 25, 2024

Senator Jesse L. James, Chair  
Committee on Senate Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children & Families

Dear Senator James:

The Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) would like to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 875 regarding an exception for xylazine test strips. Xylazine is a non-opioid substance developed for use as an animal tranquilizer and is a growing concern across the United States. Similar to fentanyl, xylazine is being mixed with other drugs to increase their potency.

Testing strips can warn the substance user of the presence of xylazine, potentially changing behavior. However, current law only excludes fentanyl testing materials from the definition of drug paraphernalia. Xylazine test strips are considered drug paraphernalia and not legal for distribution in Wisconsin. The proposed statutory change would broaden the test strips exception to include xylazine.

Milwaukee County Medical Examiner data demonstrates that opioid overdose deaths involving xylazine have increased over the last five years. In 2019, the Medical Examiner noted a single xylazine/fentanyl related death; xylazine now accounts for 27% of overdose deaths. And unlike fentanyl, persons overdosing on xylazine do not respond to Narcan making overdoses more likely to be fatal.

Finally, similar to fentanyl test strips, xylazine test strips will change behavior and save lives – one overdose death occurs every 16 hours in Milwaukee County.

Milwaukee County appreciates the opportunity to offer written testimony in support of Senate Bill 875.

Sincerely,

*Shakita LaGrant-McClain*  
Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Director

Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services



MARCIA P. COGGS HUMAN SERVICES CENTER  
1220 WEST VLIET STREET, SUITE 301 | MILWAUKEE, WI 53205  
[county.milwaukee.gov](http://county.milwaukee.gov)



To whom it may concern:

1-22-24

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I would like to share why I feel ASTOP is needed and a huge part of our community. It helps so many people that wouldn't be able to get treatment and or get treatment in a timely manner. We all know these days that it takes months to get into a counselor or a therapist. When you have this kind of trauma that is crucial time. Plus those moments of panic and needing to speak with someone can happen at any time of day.

ASTOP has their hotline available 24 hours, that is so helpful to so many.

Unfortunately, this kind of abuse happens way more than people ~~think~~ are aware of. Not only to children but also to adults.

We need a place where people can go and receive counseling and treatment. Not only for the victims but also for their families. When abuse happens, it effects so many close to the victim. We need a place where victims can go and feel safe and protected. Where people care and are willing to help. Everyone doesn't have insurance or funds to be able to

receive the treatment that they need and deserve.

Speaking from personal experience, my abuse started at a very young age. It was from someone who should have protected me, not abused me. But instead, he threatened me, if I ever told he would kill my brothers in front of me, my mom, and then he would kill me.

The abuse went on for years, I didn't say anything until right after I turned 11 years old, I was so scared but I felt I would rather be killed than to be keep being abused.

It has been 34 years since I was able to get away from the abuse. It has been a very long healing process; it definitely hasn't been an easy one. Not only for myself for my relationships, learning to trust again was very hard. Plus having a healthy sexual relationship doesn't come easy for survivors.

I'm thankful I didn't turn to drugs or alcohol to numb my pain. But I know other survivors who have. They have turned into addicts, and some have lost their lives from trying to numb the pain. Because

they weren't receiving the help they need. Talking with someone who is a neutral person and can help teach you coping skills would ~~be~~ help so many who suffer from these tragic situations. Plus, this would help our community, it wouldn't overload other resources, like suicidal calls, ER visits, etc.

When you go through these experiences you have triggers after your trauma. Triggers can happen at any time and any place. Getting back control of the situation can take anywhere from minutes to days. This can happen from seeing someone who resembles your abuser, certain noises, sounds or songs, and smells that take you back to when and where you were abused.

Many things that are normal day experiences for someone who hasn't been abused, can throw a survivor into a tailspin. Having the proper help for these victims will help our community in many ways.


We need a place where victims can go or call, and feel safe and not judged. Where their families and spouses can go and ask questions



Do they will understand what their loved ones is going through and how they can help support them. A STOP helps with these needs. Everyone doesn't have a support ~~system~~ system or friends that they can talk to and trust. We need a place for them, where they can be heard and supported.

We need to keep educating people on what happens after the abuse. We also need to educate people how to protect themselves. To know what is ok and what is NOT ok. People need to know how to protect their children and signs to watch for. People also need to know that you can't trust everyone, even if they are family or close friends. Abusers are everywhere and are usually the ones who are supposed to be protecting our children. Most abusers groom the child, then it is much easier for them to abuse when they are trusted. We need to teach people what to watch for, and what questions to ask and how to help.

Together as a community we can help each other, we need to stick together and let people know that they are important and that there is help for them. They matter, and others care.

Sincerely, Nelson 

All of us at DAIS are extremely concerned about what will happen in Wisconsin should this legislation fail. All the programs across the state are deeply connected to one another and comprise the safety net for victims of domestic violence and their children. Some programs are more vulnerable than others in terms of having to make difficult choices about limiting their programs or even closing their doors due to the impending loss of VOCA funds. The loss of even one shelter bed in Wisconsin will have ripple effects for us all, for even if DAIS is able to sustain our shelter, closures of other programs will mean that more and more victims will turn to those who remain to meet that need and I fear our waitlists will grow even further.

All of this is, of course, juxtaposed with the fact that Wisconsin has one of the highest domestic violence homicide rates in the country with those numbers increasing each year.

At DAIS we have worked hard over the last decade to diversify our revenue as much as possible given the fact that funding has not kept pace with the need. That said, this year alone we must raise \$2.1 million to fund our current operations which includes operating our shelter at a reduced census. Without additional support, DAIS will either have to close down some of our programs or increase our fundraising goal which is already extremely aggressive. We believe we have reached the top threshold of what we can accomplish with fundraising already.

There are some who believe shelters are becoming obsolete. I would say the hundreds of women, men and children DAIS shelters each year who are actively fleeing for their lives would disagree. In the words of one of our recent shelter clients, "I had no idea what to do or how [to do it], and every question I had was answered. Everyone here was so amazing and kind." Another stated, "I have absolutely no complaints about this phenomenal safe haven/peaceful shelter. Me and my family felt safe every single night in cozy beds. I will forever be thankful and will never forget each and every person that made safety possible for me and my three kiddos."

I strongly urge your support of SB877 and am extremely grateful to the authors of this bill and all those who have co-sponsored it who see the need and want to ensure the safety of all Wisconsinites.



To: Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
Date: January 25, 2024  
From: Shannon Barry, Executive Director  
Re: SB877

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill 877. I particularly wish to thank Senators James and Agard for their authorship of this important piece of legislation.

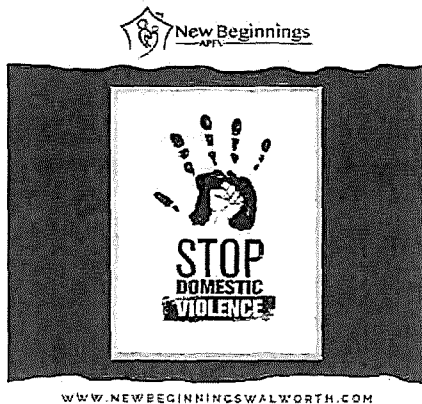
I am Shannon Barry and I have had the honor of serving as the Executive Director of DAIS (Domestic Abuse Intervention Services) for the last 17 years, though I have worked in the field of domestic violence for more than 25 years.

DAIS has been serving the Dane County community and beyond since 1977. Our mission is to empower those affected by domestic violence and advocate for social change through support, education, and outreach. Like many of the other domestic violence programs across the state, DAIS offers a myriad of crisis intervention services for victims and survivors of domestic violence and their children including a 24/7 Help Line, a 24/7 Text Line, Legal Advocacy Services, Case Management Services, Parent and Child Advocacy Services, and the ONLY homicide prevention shelter for victims of intimate partner violence in Dane County.

Dane County is growing at a pace beyond other parts of Wisconsin and we have certainly seen that reflected in the numbers of victims and survivors reaching out to DAIS for help. We are facing many challenges to keep up with the growing needs of our growing community, particularly in the face of stagnant funding from the Department of Children and Families which has not increased in more than a decade, and now with the looming reductions in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) dollars coming into the state of Wisconsin.

Between 2022 and 2023, the total number of contacts to our Help Line and Text Line (which serve as the entry point to DAIS services), increased by 19.5%. In regards to contacts by victims who had never reached out to us before, the increase in the same time period was up by 37.5% and the total number of service hours provided by DAIS advocates through our Help Line and Text line in 2023 was up over 40% from the previous year.

As I mentioned, DAIS operates the only homicide prevention shelter for victims of intimate partner violence in Dane County. We use a national lethality assessment to assess people for this program and prioritize those who are at greatest risk of being murdered by their batterers. In 2023, DAIS advocates completed 835 shelter assessments. Of those 835, 51% were approved for shelter due to the potentially lethal situations they were in. However, due to resource limitations, 89% of the people approved for the DAIS shelter were ultimately waitlisted.



**To:** Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
**Date:** January 25, 2024  
**From:** Suzi Schoenhof – Executive Director New Beginnings APFV  
**Re:** SB 877 & AB940

My name is Suzi Schoenhof, Director of New Beginnings APFV serving victims of violent crime in Wisconsin. We are the voice for survivors of domestic, interpersonal and sexual violence in both Walworth and Jefferson counties. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today, and to the legislative committee members who worked diligently to create this legislation. We would like to suggest amendments to SB877 and AB940.

Wisconsin ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the number of domestic violence homicides per capita and those numbers continue to grow. In 2022, **96** individuals died in Wisconsin due to domestic violence at a rate of approximately **one death every 3.8 days**. **1** in every **6** domestic violence homicides in the United States happens in Wisconsin. The annual economic cost of domestic violence in Wisconsin is estimated at **\$657 million**. This constitutes a public health crisis and requires a robust review process so that we can prevent future deaths.

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds victim service providers across Wisconsin; services provided under this program include safety planning, community service referrals, counseling, crisis intervention, medical and legal advocacy. Devastating cuts have been announced to begin as early as October 1, 2024. Currently the DOJ awards **\$44.5 million** per year, spread amongst **135** agencies. They have announced a **70% reduction** in the amount DOJ will be awarding for VOCA.

Some programs across the state are facing a 50% reduction in revenue for critical life-saving services. Organizations across the state may be forced to make incredibly difficult decisions with a significant loss of revenue such as closing some of their programs, curtailing the services they offer to survivors, or, even potentially closing their doors. With cuts in funding for critical, local program responses, Wisconsin is likely to see more DV homicides.

In the short term, there are bills currently under consideration in Wisconsin to help meet this gap to support critical services for the next two years (SB877 and AB940). We are humbly requesting that our state pass this legislation which will provide critical funding to sustain lifesaving and life-changing services for victims, their families and our communities. Wisconsin has a record surplus and now is the time to utilize those funds to protect and support our most vulnerable friends and neighbors by funding this critical safety net. In the long-term, our communities need to understand the fragility of the safety net for victims and their families and expect our policy makers to not only protect but expand that safety

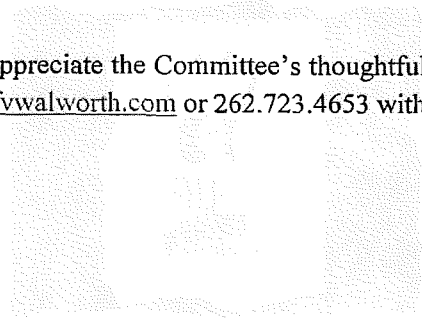


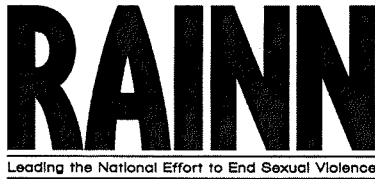
net. Local programs need support from state and federal governments to ensure that these services not only survive, but thrive.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony today. We appreciate the Committee's thoughtful consideration of our concerns, please contact me at [sschoenhof@apfwalworth.com](mailto:sschoenhof@apfwalworth.com) or 262.723.4653 with any further questions.



Suzi Schoenhof





24 January, 2023

The Honorable Jesse James  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Mental Health,  
Substance Abuse Prevention, Children  
and Families  
Wisconsin Legislature  
Room 319 South State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

The Honorable Rachel Cabral-Guevara  
Vice-Chair  
Senate Committee on Mental Health,  
Substance Abuse Prevention, Children  
and Families  
Wisconsin Legislature  
Room 323 South State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Chair James and Vice-Chair Cabral-Guevara:

We are writing to you today regarding S.B. 877, which increases grants to non-profits or public organizations that provide services to victims of sexual assault. We ask for your support in favor of this legislation.

As you may be aware, RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization. Founded in 1994, RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800.656.HOPE and [hotline.rainn.org](http://hotline.rainn.org)). Every 68 seconds, someone in the United States is sexually assaulted<sup>1</sup>, and authorities find evidence that a child in America has been the victim of sexual abuse every nine minutes<sup>2</sup>. 75% of sexual assaults are not reported to the police<sup>3</sup>, and 975 perpetrators will walk free out of every 1,000 sexual assaults<sup>4</sup>. RAINN works tirelessly to develop state and federal policies to ensure that survivors have access to justice and healing in the aftermath of violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2019 (2020). Note: RAINN applies a 5-year rolling average to adjust for changes in the year-to-year NCVS survey data.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. Child Maltreatment Survey, 2016 (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2015-2019 (2020).



Leading the National Effort to End Sexual Violence



In Wisconsin, 1,300,000 women and 637,000 men have experienced contact sexual violence<sup>5</sup>. Currently, these survivors have access to more than 60 service providers across Wisconsin, each offering services such as crisis lines, advocacy, safety planning, counseling, or support groups.

However, beginning in October of 2024, Wisconsin's Department of Justice predicts that the amount of funding available to Wisconsin through the Victims of Crime Act will decrease by 70%<sup>6</sup>. This decrease will have a significant impact on sexual assault service providers' ability to meet the current and developing needs of survivors across Wisconsin, leaving survivors without access to legal, medical, or emotional advocates.

S.B. 877 provides unequivocal support for sexual assault service providers across Wisconsin and mitigates the financial impact of the Victims of Crimes Act's decrease in funding. Its passage would ensure the physical and emotional well-being of thousands of survivors across Wisconsin.

As such, we urge you to support this bill and pass it out of committee. Thank you for your continued leadership and for supporting victims of sexual violence in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Berkowitz".

Scott Berkowitz  
President

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<sup>5</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2016-2017 (2023)

<sup>6</sup> Wisconsin Department of Justice, Office of Crime Victim Services, Victims of Crime Act Funding Update, 2023.



Testimony for SB877

The Committee Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children & Families

January 25<sup>th</sup>

Holland Dvorak

Greetings Committee Chairs of the Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children & Family. I would like to thank you for your time and willingness to hear our testimonies in support of this lifesaving bill. I would like to open and share that this is not my Colosseum. I am requesting grace as I recite numbers that set the stage for the lived experiences of survivors in the state of WI. I come to you as a WI resident and constituent, an advocate for survivors of violence, a mother, a woman but most of all a survivor.

In 2020 Racine completed their annual Point in Time identified 207 Individuals that were experiencing homelessness on the last Wednesday night in January. 23 of those individuals' self-disclosure having experienced domestic or sexual violence. 11.11% of individuals that were experiencing homelessness also have experienced violence in their lives. We know that housing is one of the primary barriers survivors are facing.

- According the NNEDV (National Network to End Domestic Violence) more than **90% of homeless women experience** severe physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives, and
- **63% have been victims** of domestic or sexual violence.
- **As many folks** shared before me we lost **96 lives** in 2022 to interpersonal violence. I can't imagine how much higher this number will be if this life saving bill is not passed.

I did not come to speak in numbers, but in certainty of life experiences that I have witnessed as a direct service provider. Survivors fled with bullet wounds in their skin, survivors fled into shelter after being held hostage with no food or water, survivors needing to bring their keys with them in the bathroom in the fear their partner will steal their car leaving them isolated and alone. I have borne witness to these stories. These testimonies are of hope as these survivors were able to share their narratives not just as survivors but as whole humans.

Victim service agencies are rooted with the expertise, training, and support to see these survivors as whole individuals. With the support of leadership, colleagues, and crucial funding for programs such as legal advocacy, 24-hour hotlines, housing, healing-centered advocacy, peer to peer support, violence prevention work, individualized safety planning survivors are empowered to determine their own destiny. Without these programs to support their community, other service providers such as housing providers, mental health providers and systems will have to pick up the broken piece and fill these gaps. With the housing crisis looming down on us, we will see robust housing programs becoming overwhelmed and unable to provide quality support to the folks in their communities.

If there is nothing to supplement the major VOCA cuts there will be catastrophic impact on community systems. Communities that are already facing challenges will be inundated with individuals fleeing violence with nowhere to go because programs will face closure, staff and programs cuts and other unforeseen consequences from such a significant challenge to our system. Survivors will be forced to engage with systems that are historically oppressive and harmful towards our most vulnerable. Without

proper training and understanding of the unique survivor's face, we will see a rise in folks staying in abusive situations because we have left them with nothing.

I know housing will be a major concern and We tend to compartmentalize services and how we approach the idea of support. Our communities will be challenged and will exacerbate an already dire situation, leaving survivors alone in the wild. The VOCA cuts will overwhelm the already compromised ecosystem, causing systems' burnout and prevent meeting the needs of our people.

The need for funding is long overdue. This is fundamentally a dire situation, 1 in 4 women & 1 in 7 men will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. We need SB788 to pass so we can continue to meet the needs of survivors and prevent future generational violence. Voting in support of SB877 will tell your community you care about their ability to thrive!



## HUD 2020 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations

*Important Notes About This Data: This report is based on point-in-time information provided to HUD by Continuums of Care (CoCs) as part of their CoC Program application process, per the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for the Fiscal Year 2020 Continuum of Care Program Competition. CoCs are required to provide an unduplicated count of homeless persons according to HUD standards (explained in HUD's annual HIC and PIT count notice and HUD's Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide <https://www.hudexchange.info/hdx/guides/pit-hic/>). HUD has conducted a limited data quality review but has not independently verified all of the information submitted by each CoC. The reader is therefore cautioned that since compliance with these standards may vary, the reliability and consistency of the homeless counts may also vary among CoCs. Additionally, a shift in the methodology a CoC uses to count the homeless may cause a change in homeless counts between reporting periods.*

### **WI-502 Racine City & County CoC**

**Point-in Time Date: 1/22/2020**

#### **Summary by household type reported:**

	Sheltered		Unsheltered	Total
	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing*		
Households without children <sup>1</sup>	110	27	10	147
Households with at least one adult and one child <sup>2</sup>	14	8	0	22
Households with only children <sup>3</sup>	1	0	0	1
<b>Total Homeless Households</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>170</b>

#### **Summary of persons in each household type:**

<b>Persons in households without children<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>110</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>148</b>
Persons Age 18 to 24	8	0	0	8
Persons Over Age 24	102	27	11	140
<b>Persons in households with at least one adult and one child<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>39</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>58</b>
Children Under Age 18	24	11	0	35
Persons Age 18 to 24	8	0	0	8
Persons Over Age 24	7	8	0	15
<b>Persons in households with only children<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Total Homeless Persons</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>207</b>

#### **Demographic summary by ethnicity:**

	Sheltered		Unsheltered	Total
	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing*		
Hispanic / Latino	10	1	2	13
Non-Hispanic / Non- Latino	140	45	9	194
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>207</b>

#### **Demographic summary by gender:**

Female	58	14	2	74
Male	92	32	9	133
Transgender	0	0	0	0
Gender Non-Conforming (i.e. not exclusively male or female)	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>207</b>

\* Safe Haven programs are included in the Transitional Housing category.

<sup>1</sup>This category includes single adults, adult couples with no children, and groups of adults.

<sup>2</sup>This category includes households with one adult and at least one child under age 18.

<sup>3</sup>This category includes persons under age 18, including children in one-child households, adolescent parents and their children, adolescent siblings, or other household configurations composed only of children.



## HUD 2020 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations

*Important Notes About This Data: This report is based on point-in-time information provided to HUD by Continuums of Care (CoCs) as part of their CoC Program application process, per the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for the Fiscal Year 2020 Continuum of Care Program Competition. CoCs are required to provide an unduplicated count of homeless persons according to HUD standards (explained in HUD's annual HIC and PIT count notice and HUD's Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide <https://www.hudexchange.info/hdx/guides/pit-hic/>). HUD has conducted a limited data quality review but has not independently verified all of the information submitted by each CoC. The reader is therefore cautioned that since compliance with these standards may vary, the reliability and consistency of the homeless counts may also vary among CoCs. Additionally, a shift in the methodology a CoC uses to count the homeless may cause a change in homeless counts between reporting periods.*

### Demographic summary by race:

	Sheltered		Unsheltered	Total
	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing*		
Black or African-American	81	10	2	93
White	63	30	8	101
Asian	0	0	0	0
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	2	0	2
Multiple Races	6	4	1	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>207</b>

### Summary of chronically homeless households by household type reported:

	Sheltered		Unsheltered	Total
	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing*		
Chronically Homeless households with at least one adult and one child <sup>2</sup>	0	0	0	0

### Summary of chronically homeless persons in each household type:

Chronically Homeless persons in households without children <sup>1</sup>	12	0	2	14
Chronically Homeless persons in households with at least one adult and one child <sup>2</sup>	0	0	0	0
Chronically Homeless persons in households with only children <sup>3</sup>	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Chronically Homeless Persons</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>

### Summary of all other populations reported:

Severely Mentally Ill	25	12	2	39
Chronic Substance Abuse	12	17	0	29
Veterans	4	27	0	31
HIV/AIDS	0	0	0	0
Victims of Domestic Violence	14	8	1	23
Unaccompanied Youth	9	0	0	9
Unaccompanied Youth Under 18	1	0	0	1
Unaccompanied Youth 18-24	8	0	0	8
Parenting Youth	7	0	0	7
Parenting Youth Under 18	0	0	0	0
Parenting Youth 18-24	7	0	0	7
Children of Parenting Youth	11	0	0	11

\* Safe Haven programs are included in the Transitional Housing category.

Tuesday, December 15, 2020

<sup>1</sup>This category includes single adults, adult couples with no children, and groups of adults.

<sup>2</sup>This category includes households with one adult and at least one child under age 18.

<sup>3</sup>This category includes persons under age 18, including children in one-child households, adolescent parents and their children, adolescent siblings, or other household configurations composed only of children.



Good morning State Legislation,

I wanted you all to know how grateful I am of this program and the services you provide funds for. Not only for my own family but countless others and their families as well. First, I want to acknowledge the benefits of therapy for mental health and psycho-social development. I feel like Psychotherapists, therapists, counselors, and social workers, are like teachers who help to provide the general population and those with psychological insults, with the tools that we need to heal and to help support healthy development of feelings, and emotions all while preparing us for the many trials and tribulations of the world by aiding persons with the tools to become the greatest assets to society. So, I understand without the funding we will still be behind in providing the help that we desperately need.

I am currently in counseling with an exceptional Therapist within your Sexual Assault Victim Services (SAVS) program for an assault that has occurred onto my child. I could have used your services as well growing up, as I too am a victim of sexual assault. While this service has been beneficial to both of us through me receiving the counseling, I realize it would have been way more beneficial for my child in her journey if she was awarded the opportunity closer the time of the assault happening. She has been on the wait list for more than 3 years. I do, however, feel the tools that I am learning through the therapist that I have been generously provided, are helping the both of us.

While working within the healthcare field for more than 20 years, not directly in line with mental health and psychology but close, I have had great opportunity to engage in many conversations with many patients and their families, and some cases ironically, I learned were related to a past trauma of some sort. I believe that untreated emotional trauma in many ways contributes to their own personal growth and their growth journey in society. Some good and unfortunately some bad. We must be able to reach victims before the lasting effects of being a victim or even linear to the survivor can bring PTSD, anger, and anxiety and intervene providing the care they will need to be able to use in positive ways. To redirect some of anger and anxieties that might have restrained them from personal growth.

I realize that funds are restricted globally for many different crises or systemic challenges, however mental health is in uproar. Life's extra additives, insults, and injuries in a person's life only add to one's adaptation to growing mentally and physically. In turn may lead to further complications and disruptions in society. I ask that funds be increased for this matter as I truly believe that we can reach more victims and their families, preparing them with coping mechanisms and resources they may need after the lasting effects of the insults, allowing focuses' also in the protection and the prevention of the next generation to becoming victims themselves. Please consider generously increasing the funds as it will increase the outlooks on the lives of victims involved in Sexual assault and similar crimes.

Respectfully,

Elena Pica



Family Advocates is a nonprofit organization serving victims of abuse in Southwestern Wisconsin. My name is Darlene Masters and I am the Executive Director. For over 40 years our agency has provided much needed services to those whose lives have been impacted by sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and more recently, human trafficking.

In 2023 alone, we served 463 individuals and had to turn away 289 people due to capacity issues. There were 4,971 nights spent in our shelter and 1,029 calls to our 24-hour crisis line. We are one agency, and these numbers are staggering.

Over the years, the needs of victims and survivors have increased without increases in funding to support the services and the efforts that are needed to enhance the lives of individuals and families that have been affected by abuse. We know that crimes such as domestic violence and sexual assault are grossly underreported and many victims do not seek services. However, with additional funding opportunities, there is also increased awareness that assists in helping victims come forward to begin their healing journey.

With the impending cuts to VOCA funding at the federal level, the need for increased dollars the need for increased dollars is more of a need. Investing in the lives of others through appropriate designation of funding through the bills before you is necessary and imperative.

I ask that you support the Senate Bill (SB877) and Assembly Bill (AB940) in order to continue to serve people who need assistance and deserve to live lives free of violence. These bills will have a positive impact on people within your own communities here in Wisconsin.

Thank you for this opportunity to present written testimony to you today. If you would like to reach me, please contact me at [director@familyadv.org](mailto:director@familyadv.org) or 608-330-2604.



Kenosha Human Development Services (KHDS) has been the recipient of VOCA funding for nearly thirty years. In 2023, 1316 survivors received services at KHDS. These include:

**VOCA Case Management/Outreach:** Survivors call for service or may be identified through contact with our Resource Center, Crisis Intervention or Housing Assistance services. The VOCA program at KHDS focuses on the intersectionality of victimization and mental health/AODA challenges and homelessness.

In 2023, 270 survivors with a cognitive/mental health disability and 83 experiencing homelessness received VOCA services at KHDS.

In 2023, VOCA Case Management provided services to 550 survivors. Peer support groups included: Relationship Recovery and Trauma Recovery at Bridges Community Recovery Center. There were also information/resource provision groups at KHDS' KARE Center for mental health stabilization and at the Shalom Center. A group was also provided at the women's Oxford House in Kenosha. 280 Survivors participated in peer support/information groups.

KHDS also provides trauma-informed therapy for survivors in our Sunrise Clinic. In 2023, 90 survivors received 929 therapy sessions.

Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Abuse represent many survivors receiving KHDS services: 1069, 100 and 75 respectively in 2023. However, those sexually abused as children (145), victims of battery (136) and survivors of a homicide (10) are represented in the spectrum of participants in KHDS' programming.

KHDS also partners with Women and Children's Horizons (WCH) and Legal Action of Wisconsin (LAW) to provide the Family Intervention Project. This project is focused on families experiencing intimate partner violence and include a FIP worker from KHDS who is trained in CPS and a FIP advocate from WCH whose expertise is advocacy. Together, they work with caregivers to implement safety in their home, increase understanding of the impact of violence on children and connect them with community-based resources. That may include legal representation from LAW for restraining orders or family court proceedings. FIP provided services in 340 cases in 2023. LAW provided legal services to 113 survivors as well.



# HOPEHOUSE

of South Central Wisconsin

To: Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
Date: January 23, 2024  
From: Laci Pustina, Co-Executive Director  
Re: VOCA Funding Bill (SB 877)

---

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am Laci Pustina, Co-Executive Director at Hope House of South-Central Wisconsin. Hope House provides crisis intervention, shelter, victim advocacy, supportive counseling, referrals to community resources, and legal and medical advocacy to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

In 2023, we served over 1,500 individuals and provided over 40,000 victim advocacy support services to individuals who've been affected by domestic and sexual violence. We serve five counties throughout the state: Sauk, Columbia, Juneau, Marquette, and Adams counties. Our total service area covers 3,465 square miles.

All Wisconsin programs, including ours, face imminent and severe cuts. This jeopardizes our ability to sustain essential services, potentially forcing us to cut or eliminate some of the most vital programs in the state of Wisconsin. As the sole provider in all five counties, victims in our area would be without safety services, shelter, support, and community resources.

Last year, we provided shelter for over 140 families, handled over 5,000 crisis calls, and supported over 1,000 victims of sexual and domestic violence. Without necessary funds, these individuals will be left without shelter, safety, and support, in turn, incurring more significant costs in the long run.

Even without cuts, existing levels fall short of meeting victims' needs. With anticipated reductions in VOCA funding, Wisconsin must invest in sexual and domestic violence services and prevention. We urge you to cosponsor legislation for increased funding—\$14 million for FY23 and \$36 million for FY24.

If you have any further inquiries, please contact me at [lacip@hopehousescw.org](mailto:lacip@hopehousescw.org). Your support is crucial in safeguarding the well-being of countless individuals and families in our community.

720 Ash Street/P.O. Box 557 | Baraboo, WI 53913  
Business: (608) 356-9123 | Fax: (608) 360-9483 | Helpline: (800) 584-6790  
[www.HopeHouseSCW.org](http://www.HopeHouseSCW.org)





To: Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

Date: January 24, 2024

PRESIDENT

Alan Johnson

From: Angela Mancuso, Executive Director, The Women's Center

RE: SB 877

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The Women's Center, founded in 1977, is the only organization in Waukesha County that provides prevention and intervention services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, and child abuse. We operate the only low barrier emergency shelter for survivors in Waukesha, and we provide a 24-Hour Hotline, the only transitional living units, individual advocacy, support groups, job readiness training, life skills development, 24/7 SANE responses, free onsite childcare, and violence prevention initiatives in schools. All our services are offered at no cost, which is a critical component of our ability to save lives. The Women's Center serves about one thousand survivors annually, responds to just under six thousand Hotline/crisis calls and provides violence prevention support to 1000 students in local schools each year. Sixty-eight percent of lethality assessments that were administered by local law enforcement were deemed high risk for being killed by their abuser in 2023.

We conservatively anticipate funding cuts of, at minimum, \$157,000 from VOCA and DCF in the upcoming year. The funding supports nineteen experienced advocates. Funding cuts this significant will impact those positions as we will be forced to cut hours and/or eliminate the positions. Less advocates means less service capacity which leads to victims remaining trapped in highly dangerous situations. The ripple effect to take into consideration is that the criminal justice system relies on service providers such as The Women's Center and similar agencies across the state. Our District Attorney's office relies on us to provide expert testimony for rape, child abuse and domestic violence cases which supports and substantiate prosecutorial argument and we provide advocates to do court accompaniment. Many victims have shared that they would not have participated with prosecution if it were not for The Women's Center. Our court accompaniment programming also furthers prosecution's arguments. The stronger the prosecution, the more perpetrators are held accountable, which leads to healthier, safer communities.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Angela Mancuso

We also expect that we will have reduced capacity to help individuals and families with their financial needs. We have operated a flexible Client Resource Fund that allows us to provide financial support to survivors for legal fees, medical bills and medications, basic needs assistance, rent and moving fees, transportation, security improvements to their homes, and much more. This fund is the only one of its kind in Waukesha County. Because of the projected VOCA cuts, we expect that our ability to provide financial assistance will be substantially reduced in FY25, especially for legal fees. As attorney costs continue to rise and pro bono services have become more difficult to access, this may leave victims with very few if any options for legal representation. Many survivors depend on representation to feel safe pursuing legal options to protect themselves. Our clients have repeatedly told us that without our financial support, they never would have been able to retain an attorney that gave them the safety and confidence to pursue a restraining order, to testify in criminal court, or to fight for custody to protect their child from continued abuse.

It is also important to note that funding cuts such as this impact more than just children and families in Waukesha. Often, we shelter victims from Milwaukee County as those shelters are always full and it is often not safe for a victim to stay in Milwaukee. Without our presence and

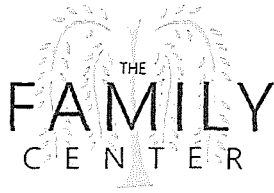
**A life-changing place since 1977.**

505 North East Avenue | Waukesha, WI 53186 | Phone 262.547.4600 | 24-Hour Hotline 262.542.3828 | [www.twcwaukesha.org](http://www.twcwaukesha.org)  
All genders welcome here.

programming, not only will Waukesha victims suffer, but Milwaukee County, which already has the highest domestic violence homicide rate in Wisconsin, will see significantly more fatalities and near fatalities as victims will have no where safe to go.

We anticipate that as other agencies face funding cuts and are forced to reduce or eliminate their programs, we will see a dramatic increase in requests for assistance that we will be unable to meet. Even if we could find outside funding to cover this deficit, we would still anticipate long-term impacts from these funding reductions on other programs if they cannot fundraise to cover their funding cuts. We have a partnership with Legal Action of Wisconsin, who provides no-cost representation to survivors during restraining order hearings, and we are deeply concerned for the future of their programming given funding cuts. Additionally, if our budget does not increase to accommodate annual wage increases, we expect to lose established Advocates. This would cause serious challenges for service delivery, as many of our Advocates have remained with the agency for at least 3 years and their institutional knowledge is integral to providing the best support to our clients.

Waukesha County has experienced two of the state's most traumatic mass killings connected to domestic violence – the Azana Salon & Spa where an abuser killed several co-workers and his wife; and the Waukesha Christmas Parade where an abuser who had abused and trafficked his victim across several states, drove through the parade after assaulting his victim, killing children and seniors, and harming dozens. The Women's Center provided support and resources for both horrifying incidents. Taking away key support systems for this state's most vulnerable is a death sentence for thousands of Wisconsin citizens.



# The Family Center

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To: Senator James, Chair  
Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
January 18, 2024

Re: SB877

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families:

The Wisconsin Rapids Family Center is pleased to support SB877 which will offset the impact of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) cuts on nonprofit organizations that serve victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The Wisconsin Rapids Family Center provides safe shelter, advocacy, trauma informed care and prevention services to victims and their children, who are fleeing domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking. In 2023 nights of shelter provided exceeded 4,800 nights, often overflowing to couches, shared rooms and hotels. Services continue to be individualized and complex to each victim, however, VOCA cuts of nearly 70% will result in the inevitable loss of ability to continue vital services.

Domestic violence in Wisconsin is a pervasive, rising problem. In 2023, 96 individuals died in Wisconsin due to domestic violence at a rate of one death every 3.8 days. 1 in every 6 domestic violence homicides in the United States happen in Wisconsin. The economic cost of domestic violence is estimated at \$657 million per year. We cannot afford to lose vital services such as those provided at shelters like The Family Center which are proven to reduce the rate of domestic violence homicides.

Sincerely,

Tricia Fancher, Executive Director  
Amy Scheide, Admin Development/Volunteer Coordinator  
Jessica Jinsky, Program Services Manager  
Heather Kirkpatrick, Finance and Operations Manager  
Wisconsin Rapids Family Center



Telephone: 715-723-1138  
Toll-Free: 1-800-400-7020  
Fax: 715-723-8460



P.O. Box 143  
Chippewa Falls, WI 54729



To: Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention,  
Children and Families

Date: January 23, 2024

From: Geri Segal, Executive Director

Re: Support of SB 877 (VOCA Funding Bill)

Chairperson Senator James and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 877 (VOCA Funding Bill). My name is Geri Segal, Executive Director, representing the Family Support Center, a not for profit agency, providing services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties. In brief, we provide safety planning, legal advocacy, counseling, assistance in obtaining employment and accessing permanent housing and emergency shelter to survivors.

I am deeply grateful to the authors and co-sponsors of this bill. As you all know, sexual and domestic violence are significant problems in Wisconsin. 1 in 5 women have experienced rape in their lifetime, and in 2022, 96 individuals died in Wisconsin due to domestic violence at a rate of approximately one death in every 3.8 days. The annual economic cost of domestic violence in Wisconsin is estimated at \$657 million.

On the local level, our agency, the Family Support Center, provided services to 773 survivors of Domestic Violence in Chippewa County, and services to 522 survivors of sexual violence in Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties in 2023. Over 90% of the survivors we serve report that they are safer and more able to cope with the trauma they have experienced as a result of our services. National research confirms that agencies like ours save lives and help survivors in all aspects of their lives.

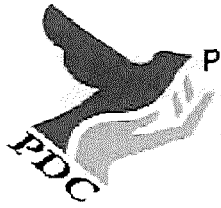
The 70% reduction in the amount DOJ will be awarding for VOCA beginning 10/1/2024 will have a catastrophic impact on our agency and survivors in Chippewa and Eau Claire County, as well as survivors throughout Wisconsin. The Family Support Center **will lose at least \$333,000 in VOCA funds**. We will have to lay off staff who provide services to survivors. This means that we will serve fewer survivors and provide fewer services. **Many survivors in Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties will be left without services and consequently survivors will be at risk.**

An increase in our funding, as proposed in Senate Bill 877, will allow us to continue providing all our services to those who need them and continue special initiatives such as our Lethality Assessment Program and our rental assistance projects.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We appreciate the committee's thoughtful consideration, and we urge you to support this Bill.

Feel free to contact me at [geri@fscf.org](mailto:geri@fscf.org) or 715-214-9878 with any questions.





**Personal Development Center, Inc.**  
**Domestic Abuse & Assault Services**

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health,  
Substance Abuse, Children and Families  
Date: January 23, 2024  
From: Renee Schulz, Executive Director - Personal Development Center, Inc.  
Re: Support of SB 877

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Senate Bill 877. Personal Development Center, Inc. (PDC) is a non-profit victim service agency serving the greater Marshfield area (northern Wood and south western Marathon County) and Clark County for nearly 47 years. We are supportive of SB 877 and respectfully urge Committee members to approve its passage.

PDC provides comprehensive advocacy and support to victims of domestic/dating violence, sexual assault, harassment, stalking, and trafficking, as well as youth victims of child physical/ sexual abuse and/or witnesses to violence within their home. Based on recent service delivery data, approximately 750 victims/survivors receive comprehensive advocacy and support services through PDC each year.

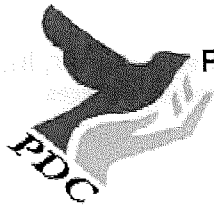
Victim service agencies across the state are facing significant challenges in meeting the influx in emergency services and transitional needs of victims/survivors, as well as sustaining necessary programs and services among an uncertain grant-funding climate. For those serving our rural communities, these challenges are compounded due to extreme isolation and sever lack of community resources to address identified needs.

For the first time in over 40 years, domestic abuse victim services funding through the state Department of Children and Families (DCF) has gone to a competitive grant process. State funding has been redistributed regionally to target urban, underserved communities; the northern region allocation has decreased significantly. As of January 1, 2025 PDC will experience a decrease of \$102,689 annually. In addition, federal pass-through funding through the Department of Justice (Victims of Crime Act funding) has also undergone significant cuts and has placed a cap on allocation amounts. Beginning October 1, 2024, PDC will experience a decrease of \$350,000 annually. With an annual reduction of over \$450,000 in revenue annually, sustainability of PDC services is in severe jeopardy.

To prepare for impending funding losses, PDC has completed a comprehensive evaluation of staffing patterns to determine where programming/service delivery can be streamlined to more efficiently utilize agency resources. We have made revisions to job descriptions to better align with staff strengths/skills/abilities while taking on additional responsibilities, and have eliminated several positions from our staffing structure. Although significant, these changes will not remedy the funding loss. Our priority remains the stabilization of current services to ensure sustainability of comprehensive safety and support for victims/survivors.

The financial consequences of abuse are considerable, not only to victims and their children, but to society as a whole. Individuals and businesses feel the impact in terms of higher health care and lost productivity costs. Our state and city governments see the costs in budgets for law enforcement, the

Personal Development Center, Inc. (PDC)  
505 East Depot St., Marshfield, WI 54449  
715-384-2971 Fax: 715-384-7826



**Personal Development Center, Inc.**  
**Domestic Abuse & Assault Services**

courts, Medicaid, and human service agencies. Police response to domestic violence calls require a multiple officer response and require many hours of investigation, interviewing, jail transports and paperwork. Making an investment to assist victims and children yields enormous dividends in human and financial returns.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony for this vital legislation. I appreciate the Committee's thoughtful consideration of the future of victim services in our state, and respectfully urge you to support this proposal. Please feel free to contact me at [execdir@pdcmarshfield.org](mailto:execdir@pdcmarshfield.org) or (715) 384-2971 with any further questions or concerns.

**Personal Development Center, Inc. (PDC)**  
**505 East Depot St., Marshfield, WI 54449**  
**715-384-2971 Fax: 715-384-7826**

Embrace Services, Inc.  
107 Lindoo Avenue East  
Ladysmith, Wisconsin 54848  
(715) 532-6976  
katie@embracewi.org



To: Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
Date: January 25th, 2024  
From: Katie Bement, Executive Director at Embrace Services, Inc. (Embrace)  
Re: Support for VOCA Funding Bill (SB 877)

---

Chairperson James and Members of the Committee, my name is Katie Bement. I'm the Executive Director at Embrace, a 24/7 victim services program and emergency shelter in the rural Northwestern Wisconsin communities of Barron, Rusk, Price, and Washburn counties. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 877 and to Senator James and the legislative committee members who worked diligently to respond to the crisis we are facing.

We're officially in uncharted territory. The cuts to the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant program have gutted funding for the domestic and sexual violence victim services and shelter programs across the country, including Embrace. The cuts are significant enough that some of our sister programs across Wisconsin will be forced to shut down entirely. For Embrace, it means **we will lose about a 1/3 of our annual operating budget, at minimum.**

Unfortunately, our most basic safety planning and crisis intervention services we have been providing to victims since 1980 are going to have to be completely restructured. We will not be able to afford to have 24/7 staff onsite at the emergency shelter. Our office hours are going to be cut back. The 24/7 text crisis line will be eliminated. The safe custody exchange program we offered to families will end February 1. There will be significantly less prevention education, outreach, and awareness efforts connecting victims to our life-saving services. The speed in which people will receive help will change and **some victims might not get help at all.**

As you know, barriers to receiving help for domestic and sexual violence can lead to tragedy, and having to wait for help is definitely a barrier. I am terrified these funding cuts mean we will not be able to help someone in time before they are killed. Before their kids are killed. Wisconsin already leads the country in the number of domestic violence homicides. 1 in every 6 domestic violence deaths in the U.S. happened in Wisconsin<sup>1</sup>. **I am asking you today to support SB 877 and work with us to make sure help is there for these victims when they need it.** Prevent them from being killed and becoming another homicide statistic.

**This bill is our last hope.** In the small, rural, and impoverished communities Embrace serves, there is no possibility we will make up this devastating loss of annual funding with private sources. Additionally, VOCA was our largest source of financial match to other state and local grant programs maintaining housing and advocacy services. The loss of VOCA also destabilizes our other grant programs. **There is nowhere else to turn.**

What can you do? You can stand with victims, and make sure they can continue to get the help they need when they need it by supporting SB 877. Victims in our communities are counting on you.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://ncadv.org/remember-my-name>





300 Crooks Street, P.O. Box 22308, Green Bay, WI 54305-2308, (920) 436-6600  
1810 Appleton Road, Menasha, WI 54952, (920) 739-4226  
36 Broad Street, Ste 150, Oshkosh, WI 54901, (920) 233-6630  
57 N 12th Avenue, Ste 110, P.O. Box 34, Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235-0034, (920) 746-9040

January 24, 2024

Dear Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families,

Please accept this letter as my written testimony regarding the VOCA (Victims Of Crime Act) Funding Bill (SB 877) and the impact the impending cuts to VOCA expected for October 1, 2024 will have on our program, clients, staff, and community. I am the Program Manager for Family Services of NE Wisconsin Sexual Assault Center program, and the Sexual Assault Center (SAC) located in Brown County has been in place since 1974 supporting victims of sexual violence and their families for 50 years as of this April 2024. The Sexual Assault Center also serves three other counties: Door, Oconto, and Marinette. In 2023, the Sexual Assault Center, with a staff of 12, served 1325 clients across the four-county service area.

The Sexual Assault Center is a 24/7 crisis response program to provide services and on-going support to victims and their families through hotline and in-person response. These services are necessary for victims and their families to find healing and support while navigating the multiple systems involved in reporting crimes of sexual violence. Research shows survivors working with advocates: have higher rates of reporting to law enforcement; are more likely to utilize healthcare services; and are less likely to be retraumatized when supported by an advocate, especially during crisis encounters. These facts support the vital role advocates play, as these positive effects and outcomes are felt by the survivors, and by extension, the community.

Advocates provided victim advocacy services directly to victims and their loved ones but advocates also work alongside many community partners from a multidisciplinary team of professionals dedicated to supporting survivors of sexual violence and holding their offenders accountable. Some key community partners include the SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Exam) Supervisor, Dana Stueber, from St. Vincent Hospital's SANE program and Brown County District Attorney David Lasee. Both Dana and David, have offered their support of the Sexual Assault Center and the services provided:

*"As a SANE program, it is our protocol to have an advocate present... Doing this brings comfort, reassurance, and knowledge of resources to our patients. My contact with my patients is very short. It is the advocates from the Sexual Assault Center that are there from the beginning, all the way through the court process..."--Dana Stueber RN, BSN, SANE-A, SANE-P*

*"Without the aid of the Sexual Assault Center staff working diligently and devotedly with victims, we can say without a doubt that there would be less offenders held accountable for their illegal behaviors, which ultimately endangers the community..."--Brown County District Attorney David Lasee*

The Sexual Assault Center (SAC) and its advocacy services are funded, in large part, by grants. Currently, the Sexual Assault Center has approximately a \$1.2M annual budget (25% fundraised & 75% grants). The





*(mirrored bleed-through text)*

Victims of Crime Act grant (VOCA) is a major source of that grant funding making up 46% of that 75%. However, that source of funding has taken a devastating cut. There will be a 70% reduction in the amount the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) will be awarding for VOCA, beginning in October 2024, and the new competitive grant cycle will only allow grantees to apply for up to \$250,000. To put that into perspective, currently our agency receives \$795,000 from VOCA. The Sexual Assault Center hopes for the 2024-2025 budget to look like: 50% fundraised & 50% grants; however, with this significant shift in one fiscal year, the Sexual Assault Center must be prepared for 2024-2025 budget to look like: 71% fundraised & 29% grants. The Sexual Assault Victim Services (SAVS) Grant Program, administered by the DOJ, is the only state program that funds sexual violence prevention initiatives and direct services for survivors and their families. Even at existing levels, SAVS and VOCA funding does not meet the needs of survivors in Wisconsin. With the expected reductions in VOCA funding, now is the time for Wisconsin to make an investment in sexual and domestic violence services and prevention.

Thank you for your time and support of the VOCA Funding Bill (SB 877).

Sincerely,

Jamie Craig  
Program Manager  
Family Services of NE Wisconsin—Sexual Assault Center  
24/7 Hotline: 920.436.8899

Reach counseling services  
1509 S Commercial St  
(920) 722 8150  
Neenah, Wisconsin 54956

To Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on  
Mental Health, Substance abuse, Prevention  
Children and families.

My name is Maria C Fabian and I work as a Bilingual Latina Advocate at Reach counseling. The reason I think this significant budget cut in the VOCA program would have serious consequences for the community is because during the time I have been working with survivors, I have realized the great need for our services to help them. Their lives are greatly transformed when they decide to report these abuses, they lose their economic and emotional stability, as well as some of the people who were their close support. We as advocates are dedicated to showing them that there is a way to obtain justice. Victims do not know their rights; they are not prepared to face this difficult path alone. Without the support of this program, they would not know how to deal with this situation.

With the support of this program, they feel understood, empowered and they gain knowledge they need to face the problems and traumas caused by this crime and to report it. A budget cut of this magnitude would greatly limit us in the service we can currently provide and not only that, but it would also limit the number of survivors we can assist.

The Perez family is a great example of the support that we give to our clients. Cintia, her three daughters, her little sister and her mother were affected by this type of crime, the age of the girls at that time varied between 5 and 16 years old. When Cintia found out that this was happening to the rest of her family, she was very afraid to report it because she feared being deported and losing her family. Fortunately, she approached Reach for help and was able to get the support she needed to report. The Perez family was assisted with resources, both she and her mother joined the support group. The girls began their therapies with Reach counselors, they were assisted with the entire process of translation and interpretation with their documents for their procedures and during their appointments, we helped them look for housing, work as well as in their immigration process and to obtain a visa just to name some of our services.

I invite you to put into perspective how many people could be harmed by not having this type of support. We know that we cannot stop sexual abuse, but we can help them move forward by overcoming trauma and regaining control of their lives.

Your support is greatly appreciated, especially by the victims and their families.

Sincerely  
Maria C Fabian

The Bridge to Hope  
2110 4<sup>th</sup> Ave N  
Menomonie, WI 54751  
(715) 235-9074  
Mollym@thebridgetohope.org



To: Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health,  
Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
Date: January 22, 2024  
From: Molly Mooridian, Executive Director  
Re: VOCA Funding Bill (SB 877)

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of The Bridge to Hope. My name is Molly Mooridian. *The Bridge to Hope is a non-profit organization committed to ending domestic abuse, sexual assault and human trafficking. We serve victims from Dunn and Pepin Counties, as well as anyone who needs our services and reaches out to us for help and support.*

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds victim service providers across Wisconsin; services provided under this program include safety planning, community service referrals, advocacy, crisis intervention and legal advocacy.

In Wisconsin, 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. In 2022, 96 individuals died in Wisconsin due to domestic violence. This is a rate of one death every 3.8 days. 1 in every 6 domestic violence homicides that happen in the United States happen in Wisconsin. It is critical that the citizens of Wisconsin have the appropriate level of funding needed to receive services as it relates to domestic violence and sexual assault.

VOCA funding is critical to our and many other victims service agencies service provision. Our programs and the victims we serve are facing what can only be described as a catastrophe. At the proposed VOCA funding level, thousands of victim service providers across the nation will be forced to lay off staff, cut programs, and/or shut their doors. The impact will fall hardest on the smallest programs, particularly programs in rural communities, low-income communities, and Communities of Color. Potentially tens of millions of victims nationwide will lose access to lifesaving and life-sustaining child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, and other victim services. Without access to these critical services, the real-time impact will not only be felt by individuals and families, but also in communities nationwide. In 2023 The Bridge to Hope received 2,609 hotline calls, provided 3,480 safe bed nights, and presented education to 3,555 attendees. 110 individuals found safe shelter at The Bridge to Hope during 2023. With the proposed VOCA cuts, we would see a significant reduction in funds and therefore a significant reduction in services. In 2023 we unfortunately had to turn away 102 individuals seeking shelter as our shelter was full during their inquiry. These individuals are always offered safety planning and co-advocacy/ referral to other shelters if they are interested. If VOCA funds are reduced this number will increase and fewer partner agencies will be open to referral for alternative emergency shelter. This will leave Wisconsin citizens with little safe support during some of their most vulnerable moments.

The Bridge to Hope, along with victim service providers across the country have worked diligently with private donors and with state and local lawmakers to secure funds to address increased need and to provide a buffer if VOCA grants are cut by 40%, as anticipated. However, even programs that have been

successful in securing state, local, and/or private funding to protect against VOCA decreases simply cannot absorb cuts of this magnitude.

We support an increase to VOCA funding to allow for the appropriate and necessary service of all victims/ survivors.

If you have any questions about The Bridge to Hope's position on this issue, please contact me at 715-235-9074 or [mollym@thebridgetohope.org](mailto:mollym@thebridgetohope.org).



1924 Wildflower Drive  
Marshfield WI 54449  
January 24, 2024

Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families  
Wisconsin State Senate

Dear Senators,

I am submitting testimony in support of Funding for victim services and domestic abuse services, training for grant recipients, grants to child advocacy centers, and making an appropriation, SB 877.

I serve on the board of directors of Personal Development Center, Inc, the agency that provides services to victims of domestic violence in Wood, Clark, and Marathon counties.

Due to the substantial adverse decrease in Federal funding for these services, securing other sources of funding for the most vulnerable members of our communities is critical. I urge you to fully support the proposed legislation. These services are a crucial component of maintaining safe and thriving communities.

Thank you for holding hearings on Senator's James bill.

Sincerely,



Brian H. Ewert



January 23, 2024

Dear Committee members:

My name is Jaime Sathasivam and I am a Co-Executive Director for Hope House of South Central Wisconsin. I am writing in support of Assembly Bill 940 and Senate Bill 877, and I am asking for your support as well.

Hope House provides services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking through our 24/7 hotline, victim advocacy (including medical, personal and legal advocacy), emergency shelter, and community education programs. We provide services to victims in Sauk, Columbia, Juneau, Marquette and Adams counties.

Services provided by organizations like Hope House are a part of the social safety net for our communities and many of the expenses related to serving survivors will not go away, they will simply be transferred to the state and local level in varying forms. Further, Hope House's client numbers in 2023 surpassed all program numbers from 2022, and we have no evidence that the need is slowing anytime soon. In 2022 Wisconsin saw more domestic violence related homicides than any previous year, and we fear that removing safety planning and shelter not just in our area, but across the state will increase the loss of lives.

Currently Hope House receives \$826,610 from the Victims of Crime Act funds, and it is our largest grant funder. These funds primarily are used to support staff who serve victims of crime, and keep our building and all of our programs operational. Serving five counties, which span a large geographic area of the state, requires more employees and available dollars to support travel and resources to keep families secure and safe in their local community. With the new DOJ grant cap of \$250,000 we will have no choice but to cut staffing and programming. The painful question is which program(s)?

In 2023 Hope House's shelter program served 142 people with 4,088 nights of stays, which meant those individuals weren't living in violence and potentially dangerous or life-threatening circumstances. It also meant countless families weren't experiencing homelessness and didn't need to return to violence just to have warm, dry place to live. We know that while shelter brings the largest programmatic cost, it is the service we can never meet the demand for, and, it is the service that literally saves lives. The most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence is when they are planning to, or leaving their abuser. Having a secure shelter is the only safe option for many who don't have the resources or family supports to find other secure housing. If they don't have a transitional place to go they are stuck in violence and trauma, and likely may remain tied to their abuser against their wishes. Cutting shelter means putting lives at risk.



HOPEHOUSE  
of South Central Wisconsin

Our Advocates supported another 1,681 individuals who were experience sexual or domestic violence by providing more than 40,000 services. Victim advocacy is our far and away our most utilized service, providing trauma-informed support and services to help stabilize after a victimization. We provide support at the hospital, in courts, in schools, in the community, and with law enforcement. We connect survivors with resources which allow them to remain safe in their living situation or in breaking free from their abuser. We support survivors of sexual assault with *ongoing care and resources* to help them as they work to heal from an invasive crime perpetrated on their body. 2023 saw record contacts (despite our agency already having the lowest number of advocates in years) in this program as well. The ability to provide safety planning, support in filing a restraining order, resources, information and emotional support at a forensic exam or law enforcement interview, and just the power of holding someone's hand and providing safety and concern after something traumatic cannot be diminished. Cutting this means that, at best, those in our most rural areas who are not able to travel or access our building and Advocates will not have any support services for in-person care. At worst, most of our service area would no longer have legal, medical, or personal advocacy support. Again, resulting in no safety services or stabilization services for victims.

The final program is our education program. This program, comprised of two employees, presented to classrooms across our five counties nearly 550 times, and provided information for adults and the larger community at an additional 58 events. Cutting this means cutting off youth from information about healthy relationships, boundaries, internet safety, sexual and domestic violence and resources and from learning ways to support someone who is experiencing violence. Losing this programming would be devastating to many youth who have experienced these things but feel alone in their experience. It also wouldn't save enough of the \$576,610 we are set to lose and our cuts couldn't stop here.

I recognize that the devastating cuts to these funds originated at the federal level, and I am grateful that Wisconsin, and you all, are looking at possibilities to intervene before these cuts take effect and cost more lives. I sincerely appreciate your consideration of this funding and am always available to speak more personally ([JaimeS@hopehousescw.org](mailto:JaimeS@hopehousescw.org)) and directly about the impact to our services and five-county service area, and I respectfully request that you vote yes on Senate Bill 877.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jaime Sathasivam

Co-Executive Director

I want to begin by thanking you, this honorable Senate Committee, for taking on the unprecedented challenge of addressing mental health, substance abuse prevention, and children and families' needs in our great state of Wisconsin. I am here today to implore you to support, advocate for, and vote yes on SB 877.

Federal funding cuts and the lack of state and local monies will have a tremendously detrimental impact on the support and services that child victims and their protective caregivers currently receive through the immeasurable work of Wisconsin's Child Advocacy Centers (CACs). Highly trained CAC staff, such as those working at CACs in Marshfield and Hayward, minimize and dismantle the inherent barriers to quality trauma-informed mental health and child victim services in our rural communities in central and northern Wisconsin.

SB 877 will allow CACs to continue to provide direct services to children and families throughout Wisconsin; services that strongly align and support the vision and goals of this committee's great work.

Furthermore, CACs are a direct pathway to mental health, safety and social emotional and academic growth for children. When a single child victim, a survivor of crime, interpersonal violence, neglect or drug exposure regains their voice, their autonomy, their capacity to trust, and their ability to build healthy and secure attachment relationships within their community; mental illness can be prevented, substance abuse can be eliminated, and the pernicious cycle of intergenerational harm and hurt can stop with that one child.

Please convey to all our hardworking state legislators, to allow CACs to partner with this committee's work and vision for a healthy, productive, and resilient citizenry. Please support and vote yes on SB 877.

Respectfully,

Tony Iniguez

9610 Stadt Rd, Marshfield, WI 54449





# Willow Tree

Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center

Dear Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families,

I am writing to implore you to support Senate Bill 877, which includes an increase in funding for Child Advocacy Centers across the State of Wisconsin. Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) are the ONE non-profit to serve as the first stop for children suspected to be victims of sexual abuse, severe physical abuse, and those who have witnessed a violent crime. CACs provide a safe, child-friendly environment where law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, medical and mental health professionals may share information and develop effective, coordinated strategies sensitive to the needs of each unique case and child. CACs provide a neutral location to assist law enforcement, Child Protective Services and District Attorneys Office with conducting investigations of child maltreatment, which at the same time providing supportive services to the child to heal from the abuse and trauma they experienced.

In 2023, over 7,000 children received critical services at Wisconsin's CACs. In current statute, Wisconsin's 15 CACs receive just \$17,000 annually in state funding, specifically for medical quality assurance, training, and education. Wisconsin's CACs are at risk of significant funding cuts in future years due to critical funding streams, such as the Victims of Crime Act, being drastically reduced. With this, critical services to Wisconsin's child victims of maltreatment will inevitably be cut or reduced. Wisconsin CACs receive some of the lowest state funding out of the nation.

Wisconsin: just \$255,000 annually

compared to:

Illinois: \$11,000,000 annually

North Dakota: \$6,750,000 annually

Iowa: \$1,068,285 annually

Michigan: \$1,300,000 annually

Indiana: \$1,500,000 annually

The Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center is one of 15 Child Advocacy Centers in Wisconsin, located at 503 S. Monroe Ave Green Bay WI. Willow Tree receives referrals from Law Enforcement and Child Protective Services agencies throughout Northeast Wisconsin to assist with an active child abuse investigation. Willow Tree provides vital services as a child and their family navigates through a criminal investigation, while at the same time providing supportive services to help the family move forward to heal from the trauma they have experienced.

Services offered at Willow Tree, consist of Child Forensic Interviewing, supportive victim advocacy services, Child Abuse Medical Evaluations, conducted by Children's Wisconsin, Child Abuse Prevention Education and Trauma Focused Counseling.

Child maltreatment investigations involve many different professionals, commonly referred to as a Multi-Disciplinary Team. These investigations involve Child Protective Services workers, Law Enforcement, Medical Providers, Advocates, Child Forensic Interviewers, Counselor, and Prosecutors. Instead of a child having to speak to everyone involved in the case, the child is provided with the opportunity to speak to a trained Child Forensic Interviewer regarding the abuse they experienced in a way that is sensitive to their needs, trauma informed and legally sound. All interviews at Willow Tree are recorded to preserve the child's statement. These recordings are submitted to evidence and can be used in subsequent legal proceedings.

Every child who comes to Willow Tree is provided an advocate to assist them through the investigation and healing process. Our Child Maltreatment Medical Team with Children's Wisconsin provides comprehensive medical evaluations to ensure that the child is physically healthy and safe, however these evaluations can also produce evidence to assist in the investigation.

The Willow Tree Child Abuse Prevention Education Program provides children with education about body safety, helping them to understand that they can say no and tell someone if they are being abused. Willow Tree is proud to be part of the Green Bay Area Public School Districts core curriculum. With the partnership of the Green Bay School District, all children enrolled in

grades Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade receive child abuse prevention education, from the Willow Tree Prevention Specialist.

In 2023, Willow Tree conducted 384 Child Forensic Interviews, 188 Child Maltreatment Medical Evaluations and provided 9,509 children and 1,238 adults in Brown County Schools with Child Abuse Prevention Education. Willow Tree received 61% of referrals from Brown County Jurisdictions and 39% of referrals were received from jurisdictions outside of Brown County, primarily Northeastern Wisconsin. The most common age of a child who received a Child Forensic Interview at Willow Tree in 2023, was a 7-year-old female regarding an allegation of sexual abuse.

Every child who comes to Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center is unique and different in their own. No disclosure of abuse will be the same, however, one thing that remains consistent is that Willow Tree provides a safe, child-friendly environment to every child who walks through the doors. Willow Tree is here to support children from the start of an investigation and will continue to support them through their healing process. For every hardship we see at Willow Tree, we see hope in the eyes of the children we work with, we see resilience, we see children moving towards a safer future.

Our community is very fortunate to have a Child Advocacy Center to hold offenders accountable, keep communities safe and most importantly help children to heal. Children are some of the most vulnerable members of our society, they are our future leaders, parents, and professionals. It's not just Willow Tree supporting these children to a healthy adulthood, it is our communities and our State, who can be supporters so all our children can thrive and have the opportunity to grow into caring and healthy adults.

Thank you for your commitment and support to Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center. Your support for Senate Bill 877 is vital to ensure that all CACs in the State of Wisconsin continue to provide help and support to children and to keep them safe.

Thank you for your consideration,

*Kristie Sickel*

Kristie Sickel, MSW, CSW  
Program Manager and Child Forensic Interviewer  
Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center  
503 S. Monroe Ave.  
Green Bay WI 54301  
920-436-8881

**Schmidt, Melissa**

---

**From:** Jason Lee <jlee@jellyrogue.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 25, 2024 8:13 AM  
**To:** Casola, Victoria  
**Subject:** SB877

Hello,

I am asking for support in passing SB877.

With Child Advocacy Centers serving over 7,000 children in Wisconsin they are a crucial service that needs to be accessible throughout the state. This need is extremely important in our rural communities just as much as metropolitan areas.

The services that are provided through CACs are unprecedented and ensure the care and safety for the children and families that utilize them.

Thank you,

--

**J. LEE**  
Marshfield, WI



Dear Senate Committee,

I am writing to seek your support of Senate Bill 877, which includes an increase in funding for Child Advocacy Centers across the State of Wisconsin. Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) are the **first stop** for children when there are active investigations of child maltreatment. Children and their families come to CACs when they've experienced victimization of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, drug endangerment, if they have witnessed interpersonal violence, gun violence, or other violent crimes. CACs provide a safe, child-friendly environment where law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, medical and mental health professionals may share information and develop effective, coordinated strategies sensitive to the needs of each unique case and child. Last year, over **7,000 children** received critical services at Wisconsin's CACs.

As a Child Abuse Prevention Specialist in Northeastern Wisconsin, I can also attest to the preventative efforts being done in the community to empower children. Our program works diligently to provide children with age-appropriate knowledge about their safety, while fostering strong personal safety skills. Through established partnerships within public school communities, our CAC program alone, educated over **9,500 children** last year. These children learned how to recognize safe and unsafe touches, unsafe tricks or secrets, red flag behavior, and how to get help for safety problems. With increased funding, we can only imagine the efforts that could continue to create safer families and communities in Wisconsin.

In current statute, Wisconsin's 15 CACs receive just \$17,000 annually in state funding, specifically for medical quality assurance, training, and education. **Wisconsin's CACs are at risk of significant funding cuts in future years** due to critical funding streams, such as the Victims of Crime Act, being drastically reduced. **With this, critical services to Wisconsin's child victims of maltreatment will inevitably be cut or reduced.** Wisconsin CACs receive some of the lowest state funding out of the nation.

### **Wisconsin: just \$255,000 annually**

*compared to:*

Illinois: \$11,000,000 annually

North Dakota: \$6,750,000 annually

Iowa: \$1,068,285 annually

Michigan: \$1,300,000 annually

Indiana: \$1,500,000 annually

Now is a critical time for Wisconsin to invest in its most vulnerable children and families. CACs provide education, healing, trust, and justice to child victims of maltreatment. Wisconsin CACs need funding to provide these direct services to child victims, including forensic interviewing, mental health services, victim advocacy, medical evaluations, and school-based prevention programs.

Please support Senate Bill 877 for Wisconsin's vulnerable child victims of maltreatment.

Thank you for your consideration,

Chelsey Steffens, B.S.  
Prevention Specialist / Victim Advocate  
Willow Tree Cornerstone Child Advocacy Center

## Schmidt, Melissa

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**From:** Faith HolleyBeal <FHolleybeal@fswaukesha.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 25, 2024 8:49 AM  
**To:** Casola, Victoria  
**Subject:** SB877

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing this in support of SB 877. As someone who has worked in the victim service field since 1989, I can speak firsthand to the importance of the work done by not only domestic violence/sexual assault organizations but also Child Advocacy Centers. Child Advocacy Centers have changed how Waukesha County has approached child abuse cases since our program opened in 2006. The coordination and efficiency that has been created by establishing a multidisciplinary team, who has a safe, neutral place to conduct part of their child abuse investigation has not only strengthened the working relationships between law enforcement, social services, victim serving agencies, the district attorney's office, and medical providers, it has also strengthened the engagement of child victims and their families in cooperating with these investigations. Child Advocacy Centers save communities money by this efficiency. Funding of these programs is vital to keep our communities safe.

Thank you,  
Faith Holley-Beal

Faith Holley-Beal, MS, LCSW  
Director, The C.A.R.E. Center  
A program of Family Service  
726 N. East Avenue  
Waukesha, WI 53186  
(262) 522-3680



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HS-512